

A STUDY OF THE INDIGENOUS CONTRIBUTION TO TAMIL  
ŚAIVA BHAKTI

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I declare that I have composed this thesis myself, and that it is my own work.

## ABSRACT

The Tamil **bhakti** movement, which arose and flourished between the 6-9th centuries CE, represents the first truly devotional religion in the history of Hinduism. It was the result of the synthesis of two separate cultural traditions, Āryan and Tamil, and, although it was divided into two separate sects, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava, this thesis is primarily concerned with the Śaiva **bhakti** movement and the contribution of Tamil culture and ideals to its formation. **Bhakti** is a religion of direct experience, characterised by an intense, personal relationship between the devotee and God, and based upon the hymns of mystical poets, the Nāyanmārs, who expressed their profound love for Śiva through the medium of the Tamil language. The aim of this thesis is to show that Tamil Śaiva **bhakti** is not only inseparable from the indigenous tradition but that it also provided the necessary stimulus for the expression of a passionate, emotional response to a loving God. The hymns of the four major Śaiva **bhakti** poets, Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar, and Māṇikkavācakar, and the female mystic Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār, form the basis for the **bhakti** evidence, whilst evidence for the indigenous contribution is drawn from the classical Tamil literature, further illuminated by archaeological, architectural, inscriptional and ethnographic evidence.

The contribution of Tamil culture to **bhakti** is considered under four main themes:

- 1.) The relevance of the indigenous literary tradition to **bhakti**, in particular the poetic structure and conventions of the **akam** tradition, in which natural imagery was correlated with human emotions, and which the **bhaktas** employed to express their emotional experience of the deity. The literature also provides insight into the beliefs and concepts of the early Tamils which were to shape and condition the **bhaktas'** world-view and their perception of Śiva.
- 2.) The shrine-oriented character of **bhakti** and the importance of sacred places in the **bhaktas'** experience of the divine, which represents the continuation of the earlier ideology which perceived the divine as present in earthly reality and immanent in the landscape of Tamiḻnāṭu, and worshipped it in the natural phenomena of the Tamil land.
- 3.) The ecstatic and communal nature of **bhakti**, which is reminiscent of the earlier worship of the Tamil deity, Murukan, whose worship was partly a form of indigenous shamanism, and also involved the active and enthusiastic participation of worshippers in divine experience.
- 4.) And, finally, the role of the sacred feminine in **bhakti** which is related to Tamil attitudes and beliefs regarding women and marriage, relevant not only in the classical age but also in modern Tamil society. These beliefs influenced both the **bhaktas'** understanding of themselves as women in love with a male deity and their poetic portrayal of the Goddess, and they also appear to have been essential to their ultimate understanding of Śiva's totality.

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## General Introduction

Tamiḷnāṭu is a distinct region in the south of Peninsular India which lies between the Eastern Ghats to the north, Cape Comorin to the south, the Nilgiri, Palni and Cardamon hills to the west, and the Bay of Bengal to the east, geographical features which, in both the prehistoric and early historic periods, resulted in its relative isolation from North Indian political and cultural influence. The home of the ancient kingdoms of the Pāṇṭiyas, Cōḷas and Cēras, Tamiḷnāṭu maintained an indigenous cultural tradition quite distinct from the Indo-Āryan civilisations of the north, having a language, literature and ideology of its own, although increased contact with the north throughout the first few centuries CE, through trade, migrations and pilgrimage, led to the progressive Āryanization of the Tamil tradition. Between the 6th and 9th centuries CE the increased penetration of Āryan ideas into the south resulted in the formation of a popular religious movement characterised by **bhakti**, an intensely emotional attitude of devotion to a loving and personal God. Based upon the hymns of the Śaiva Nāyanmārs and the Vaiṣṇava Ālvārs, mystical poets who, for the first time in the Hindu tradition, expressed their deeply felt love for God in the vernacular language of the region, it found wide appeal among the mass of the Tamil people, and was later to form the basis for two of southern India's most important schools of thought, the Śaiva Siddhānta and the Śrī Vaiṣṇava. The **bhakti** movement was not an entirely new religious development but combined the beliefs of both Āryan and Tamil cultural traditions in an extraordinary synthesis, and resulted in the first truly devotional

religion in India which was to have a significant effect upon the development of Hinduism throughout India as a whole. Although it is equally well represented by both the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava strands, which developed in tandem with each other and display similar features, this thesis is primarily concerned with the Śaiva **bhakti** tradition, and an analysis of the Tamil, rather than Āryan, elements which influenced its formation. Before proceeding to an examination of the indigenous features which came to bear upon **bhakti**, however, a brief summary of the history of the term, the political and religious background which preceded the rise of the movement, and an introduction to the major Śaiva **bhakti** poets and their works will first be required.

### *The Vedic Background*

The term **bhakti** derives from the Vedic tradition of the north and, although it is commonly translated as "devotion" or "love", it lacks any such meaning in the earliest texts. It stems from the Sanskrit root **bhaj** "*to share, divide, partake, participate*"<sup>1</sup> which, as it is employed in the earliest literature, for example Ṛg Veda 10.15.3, has the sense of participation in the sacrifice although, by the time of the Bhagavad Gītā (ca.2BCE), the sense of participation had developed to mean that between God and the devotee - for example, in BhG 4:11 Kṛṣṇa says "*In whatever way men take refuge in me, in the same way do I participate (bhajāmi) in them*"<sup>2</sup>. The term **bhakti** itself initially had the meaning "*belonging to, loyalty to, liking for*"<sup>3</sup> and, in Pāṇini's sūtras of the 4th century BCE, in particular sūtras IV,3,83-100, it is employed with the sense of loyalty towards kings and other rulers by their subjects<sup>4</sup>. In the Bhagavad Gītā, **bhakti** appears either with the sense of loyalty to Kṛṣṇa, for example, BhG IV,3 **bhakto'si** "*you are loyal*", or in conjunction with terms that imply "mental concentration" eg. VIII,22 (**ananyā bhakti**), XIII,10 (**ananya-yogena**

**bhakti**), and XIV, 26 where it appears as the compound **bhakti-yoga**<sup>5</sup>, contexts which, as Friedhelm Hardy has argued, are completely lacking in passion and render the term with an "intellectual" rather than an "emotional" sense<sup>6</sup>. In the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (5th-4th centuries BCE), which identifies the absolute Brahman with Rudra-Śiva, **bhakti** occurs in the last verse, and, although this verse may represent a later interpolation, **bhakti** again appears in a context which implies mental concentration and loyalty on the part of the devotee, in this instance not only to the deity but also to the spiritual teacher, rather than an emotionally charged response to a personal God:

*"To the great-souled man who loyally  
And greatly loves (bhakti) [his] God,  
Who loves his spiritual master even as his God,  
The matter of this discourse will shine with clearest light..."*  
Śv.Up.6.23<sup>7</sup>

It was not until the 9th century CE, in the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa<sup>8</sup>, and after the Tamil **bhakti** movement was well established, that the ecstatic and passionate response to the deity on the part of the devotee which characterises and distinguishes southern **bhakti** from the earlier attitude of loyalty towards and intellectual concentration upon God, appears in any Sanskrit text. It includes ecstatic features such as trance, loss of consciousness, frenzy and euphoria, and, according to Hardy, this passionate response to the deity, hitherto absent from Sanskrit literature, represents the fact that *"the character of intellectual bhakti was completely transformed under the influence of a regional, vernacular religion"*<sup>9</sup>.

#### *Cultural Contacts with the North*

Despite the relative isolation of Tamiḷnāṭu from northern influence there is evidence that from as early as the Mauryan period there were cultural and religious contacts between the two regions.

Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra suggests that there was trade occurring between the north and the south in the early Mauryan period and the second and thirteenth Rock Edicts of Aśoka mention the Pāṇṭiyan and Cōḷa kingdoms as independent of Aśoka's territory although involved in commercial intercourse. It is known that at the time of Aśoka Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanic teachers were in the southern Deccan, and the spread of these faiths is further supported by references to Brahman communities in the south in the classical Tamil literature, as well as numerous inscriptions found in natural caves throughout Tamiḷnāḍu which are believed to be the work of Jain and Buddhist monks<sup>10</sup>. Evidence for early contacts with the north is also attested to by a bilingual coin, in both Prakrit and Tamil, of the Śātavāhana king Vasiṭiputa Śātakani which dates to ca. 170 CE, and indicates that the Tamil language was considered of some importance in the Deccan by this time<sup>11</sup>, cultural influences from the south also penetrating northwards.

It was not until the reign of the Guptas (320-540 CE), however, that the penetration of Āryan ideas into the south had any significant effect upon the indigenous Tamil tradition. During this period some of the foremost characteristics of popular Hinduism were established, and the two deities, Viṣṇu and Śiva, became the pre-eminent objects of worship. Hindu mythology acquired its definitive form, and was written down by brahmins in Sanskrit in the Purāṇas, texts which also contain information on the genealogies of dynasties, both mythological and historical, and instructions for the construction of temples, the correct forms of worship and pilgrimage, as well as guidance on the four stages of life and the duties of class, great emphasis being laid on the ritual purity of brahmins. A large amount of other classical Sanskrit literature was also produced, including the works of Kālidāsa, a member of Chandra Gupta II's court (375-415). The Gupta kings took the names of Gods for themselves, thereby identifying their



position as rulers with that of the divine sovereigns, Viṣṇu and Śiva, and also called themselves devotees of God (*bhāgavatas*). The first permanent stone Hindu temples were built under royal patronage, and the first icons were sculpted, the image becoming the centre of worship with a consequent decrease in the importance of sacrifice and the services of a sacrificial officiant, although, as guardians of social behaviour, the brahmans' position was firmly established. By the 6th century many of the features of Purāṇic Hinduism as it was formulated in the Gupta period had entered south India, and, according to A.K.Ramanujan and Norman Cutler, this period was when "*the two 'classicisms' of India, that of the Guptas and that of Tamil classical poetry, seem to meet*"<sup>12</sup>.

### *The Tamil Background*

Political authority in Tamiḷnāṭu in the last few centuries BCE and the early centuries CE was based chiefly around three kingdoms, the Pāṇṭiyas, Cōḷas and Cēras, who ruled over the urban populations of their respective capital cities, Maturai, Uṛaiyūr and Vañci, and also held sway over a number of other towns in their territory. The political and social organisation of the rural population, however, appears to have been quite complex, and structured according to territorial divisions, possibly dictated by the discontinuous nature of the terrain, and the degree of control the three main dynasties exerted in this area is difficult to assess. The rural population seems to have been divided into various different and autonomous groups, including hill tribesmen, fishermen, pastoralists and agriculturalists, who were ruled over by numerous locality chieftains, although, by the 4th century CE, the agriculturalists had come to dominate the rural social structure, possibly as a result of their greater access to economic benefits, particularly in the fertile region surrounding the Kāverī River Delta<sup>13</sup>. Economic superiority may also account for the overall

and sustained political dominance of the three major kingdoms, for, although the physical nature of the terrain meant that large agrarian-based kingdoms, such as that of the Guptas in the north, could not develop in most regions in the absence of extensive irrigation, their affluence is attested to by evidence for a thriving and prosperous maritime trade between Tamiḷnāṭu and countries of the Mediterranean and Middle-East. There is, for example, both literary and archeological evidence for overseas trade with the Greeks and Romans from an early period. A people known as the Yavanas (Greeks) are mentioned in a number of early Tamil texts, for example, Akanānūru 149 and Puṛanānūru 56, and 343 (2nd-4th centuries CE) which relate how they came with gold and wine and returned with pepper, and Mullaippāṭṭu 66 (3rd-5th CCE), where the Yavanas are mentioned as body-guards to kings<sup>14</sup>. There is also the evidence of Greek and Roman authors including Pliny the Elder (75CE), Ptolemy (130CE), and the anonymous author of The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea (240CE)<sup>15</sup> for trading contacts with south India, and archaeological evidence from Arikamedu, near Pondicherry on the east coast, shows it to have been an old Roman settlement, probably a trading station, although Roman trade ceased around the 2nd or 3rd century CE<sup>16</sup>. Despite the various social and political territorial divisions, however, Tamil society displays a remarkable degree of unity and continuity of cultural tradition and language, even in the pre-historic period, which characterises the population as a whole as a distinct cultural group.

The power of the three major kingdoms remained intact for many centuries, the exploits of the various rulers recorded and glorified by an indigenous tradition of bardic poetry. However, from the 4th-6th century CE, a period of political confusion appears in Tamil history for which there is scant literary and inscriptional evidence, but what little there is indicates that the Tamil people were subjected to the control of a conquering force known as the kaḷabhras or kaḷavers,

a people who were recalled with terror and who were said to have abused the families of the local chiefs of the plain and brahmans of the villages.

The limited evidence for this period mainly post-dates it but includes: Buddhadatta's manual of the 5th CCE<sup>17</sup> in which he tells of a Kaḷabhra ruler, Accuta Vikkanta, said to have been his patron; the Velvikudi Grant of the late 8th C, which tells of a cruel king called Kaḷabhra who defeated many ādirājas (Tamil monarchs) and established sway over Maturai<sup>18</sup>; and an account by Amitasagara, a 10th C Jain grammarian, who reports some of the songs celebrating Accuta Vikkanta. This evidence points to the fact that the kaḷabhras lent support to Jainism and Buddhism<sup>19</sup>, and it is probably not coincidental that the 4th-6th centuries also saw the rise to prominence of the heterodox faiths in the south. Their influence is evident in the Tamil literature of the period, in a considerable amount of gnomic verse, the first in the Tamil language, which propounds Jain and Buddhist doctrines such as the idea of impermanence of life in this world, and also in large-scale narrative works in Tamil, such as the Cilappatikāram and Maṇimēkalai, which display many Jain and Buddhist characteristics. The strongholds of the Buddhist and Jain traditions were in the towns amongst the mercantile classes, attested to by numerous inscriptions and accounts by Buddhist pilgrims like Hsüang-Tsang. He visited Kāñcī in 640 CE, and, although he remarked upon the decline in Buddhism in the city, he also noted that it had yielded to Digambara Jainism<sup>20</sup>. Brahmanism, on the other hand, appears to have found greater support amongst the peasant agriculturalists of the plains region<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, the lack of evidence for bhakti in Hsüang-Tsang's account of the religious activity in Kāñcī in the middle of the 7th century would appear to suggest that the bhakti movement, which was already established at this time, had its roots further south in Tamiḷnāṭu, possibly in the plains area where the



influence of Brahmanism was the strongest.

The beginning of the decline of Buddhism and Jainism in the south is associated with further changes in the political sphere, the "long historical night"<sup>22</sup> of the **ka<sub>l</sub>abhra** period coming to an end in the last quarter of the 6th C with the rise to power in the north of Tamiḷnāṭu of the Pallavas and the re-emergence of the Pāṇṭiyas as a potent political force in the area around Maturai. Although the influence of Jainism in particular was to continue for a number of years following the ascension to power of the Pallavas, this period saw the emergence of the **bhakti** movements, and, with them, the reassertion of much which had characterised the earlier indigenous tradition, although modified and transformed under the influence of Brahmanic religion. This period is consequently known as the Tamil Renaissance.

### *The Bhakti Movement*

The central framework around which **bhakti** was formulated, that is the supreme deity Śiva, the mythology and some of the main philosophical concepts, derives from the Āryan tradition of the north. Śiva was conceived of by the **bhaktas** in terms of Purāṇic mythology, although many mythical symbols adapted and changed name, acquiring a special significance typical of the south. Ancient Tamil Gods were also assimilated into the Śaiva pantheon, Murukan being identified with Subrahmaṇya, Śiva's son, and Kor<sub>r</sub>ravai, the ferocious Mother Goddess of the Tamils, with Durgā. Although **bhakti** is, in the main, more devotional than philosophical, the real philosophical system only developing later with the Śaiva Siddhānta School<sup>23</sup>, it was heir to an Indo-Āryan ideology which included the concepts of **karma** and **mokṣa**. These were, however, again modified, karmic inheritance being considered redeemable through God's grace and the religious goal, liberation with Śiva, believed possible within this life, rendering

**samsāra** redundant.

In many ways, however, the **bhakti** tradition represents a movement of opposition to the beliefs and practices of both Brahmanism and the heterodox faiths of Buddhism and Jainism. It cut across barriers of sex and caste, being open to devotees of both sexes and any caste, and further opposed these religious traditions by stressing the reality of the phenomenal world in the experience of the Ultimate, locating the deity in specific places in the Tamil landscape. The **bhakti** conception of the phenomenal world was not an illusion: *"God was individualized and made completely real, so to say "solidified" in a very concrete form of the idol worshipped in the temple; at a given moment in time, God was dwelling in a concrete and near place, in a familiar local shrine"*<sup>24</sup>. Nor did the devotees reject society for an aesthetic life-style but lived within it, maintaining social relationships, and even marrying<sup>25</sup>.

The opposition of the **bhakti** movement to much which characterises the Indo-Āryan traditions, whilst also accepting the normative Purāṇic religious structure, indicates that another, conflicting ideology was working within **bhakti** which had its roots in the indigenous cultural tradition. In their experience of the divine the **bhaktas** stressed the immanence of the deity, and this, together with many of the ecstatic features which exemplify **bhakti**, reflects the world-view of the ancient Tamils, which not only located the divine in the phenomenal world, but which also allowed direct access to it through the practice of various "shamanic" techniques. The **bhakti** perception of the deity as immanent and capable of action in the human rather than the mythical realm, the idea that God was able to bring his grace (**aru!**) and love (**anpu**) into the hearts and minds of his devotees, allowing them to achieve their ultimate spiritual goal here-and-now, without the interference of a religious specialist, as well as the acceptance of women as spiritual equals, owes much to the

southern Tamil ideology.

The poets were also heir to a tradition of classical Tamil literature, which included both love and heroic poetry, and, in their hymns of praise to Śiva, composed in the vernacular, they not only continued in a line of literary convention that was peculiar to the Tamil country, but also implemented its unique structure to describe their experience of God. By bringing their own cultural perceptions and tradition to bear upon Āryan religion, therefore, the Tamil **bhakti** poets integrated two separate traditions and thereby transformed them both, establishing a religion based on some of the most beautiful mystical poetry in the Indian tradition.

### *The Poets*

There are traditionally said to be 63 Nāyanmārs or "masters", the poets of the Śaiva **bhakti** tradition, although to these must be added Māṇikkavācakar, who, although he is not numbered among the Nāyanmārs is indeed a **bhakti** poet. He is known as one of the four Camayācāryas or "preceptors of the faith", the other three being Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar, the three authors of the Tēvāram, regarded as the foremost poets of Tamil Śaivism. The works of these four poets and that of a female **bhakta**, Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār, are the best documented in English translation, and it is the hymns of these five poets, therefore, which will form the basis of the **bhakti** evidence to be considered in the course of this thesis, although the traditions surrounding these poets as recorded in the Periya Purāṇam, a 12th C hagiographical work on the lives of the Nāyanmārs by Cēkkiṃlār, will also be taken into account.

The earliest **bhakti** poet is generally believed to be Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār, a female mystic who, because of the less developed expression of **bhakti** in her hymns, which recalls the sense of loyalty attributed to **bhakti** in the early Sanskrit texts rather than a loving

response to the deity, is usually placed around 550CE<sup>26</sup>. However, although her poetry tends to concentrate on a relationship with Śiva which has analogies with that between a master and a servant, it also displays many ecstatic features, and her behaviour led to her being known by the tradition as *pēy* or demon, a title she herself uses to sign her poems.

Appar is traditionally held to be a contemporary of the Pallava monarch Mahendravarman I (570-630), and he is also said to have met Campantar - according to the *Periya Purāṇam* the two men met at Tiruppugalūr and travelled to several other shrines together. It is Campantar who is said to have given Appar, literally "father", his name, indicating that Appar was the elder poet, and he has been placed anywhere between 570-670CE<sup>27</sup>.

Campantar is said to have converted the Pāṇṭiyan king *Ninṛacīr Neṭumāraṇ* from Jainism to Śaivism and this monarch has been identified by Nilakanta Sastri as *Arikēcari Pārāṅkuca Māravarman* (670-700CE)<sup>28</sup>. The tradition also maintains that he met another *Nāyaṇār*, *Ciṛuttoṇṭar*,<sup>to</sup> whose devotion to Śiva he refers in a hymn. According to the *Periya Purāṇam*, *Ciṛuttoṇṭar* was the commander-in-chief of a Pallava king who raided *Vātāpi*, the capital of the Chalukyas, and brought back treasure. The invasion of *Vātāpi* is referred to in the *Kuṇṇam* plates of *Parameśvaravaram I* (668-690CE), and is recorded as having taken place in 642CE<sup>29</sup>. Campantar, therefore, has also been placed in the 7th century, although he must be slightly later than Appar.

Cuntarar refers in the *Tiruttoṇṭattokai*, *Tev. VII*, to a *Kāṭavarkōṇ* or "Kādava king" who protected the whole world surrounded by the sea, and this may refer to *Narasimhavarman Pallava II* (690-728)<sup>30</sup>, placing him sometime at the end of the 7th and beginning of the 8th century. The tradition of 63 *Nāyaṇmārs* is based on a hymn by Cuntarar, also contained in the *Tiruttoṇṭattokai*, which gives a list of



62 Nāyaṇmārs, to which must be added the poet himself<sup>31</sup>.

Highly revered by Śaiva devotees, Māṇikkavācakar is said to have been prime minister to a Pāṇṭiyan king (Arimarttanar) of Maturai prior to his conversion to Śaivism, and, although he is not a Nāyaṇār, his works express a very mature form of **bhakti**, and are included in the Śaiva **bhakti** canon, the Tirumuṟai, part VIII. The style of his hymns, and the fact that Cuntarar was unaware of Māṇikkavācakar when he composed his hymn on the 62 Nāyaṇmārs, indicates that he is of a later date than the other **bhakti** poets, and probably lived in the mid 9thC<sup>32</sup>.

### *The Śaiva Bhakti Canon*

The hymns of Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar were the first to be codified by Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi in the 10th C<sup>33</sup>, and they were classified on the basis of musical tunes (**paṇmurai**) into seven books collectively known as the Tēvāram. The Tēvāram consists of a total of 7596 **patikams**, or hymns, a new song form in Tamil generally consisting of ten stanzas, although it may contain eleven or twelve verses<sup>34</sup>. The first three books comprise 383 hymns by Campantar, the next three books 313 hymns by Appar, and the last book 100 hymns by Cuntarar. These later came to form the first seven sections of the twelve part Śaiva **bhakti** canon, the Tirumuṟai.

The Tirumuṟai<sup>35</sup> itself is a heterogenous collection of devotional works that span at least six centuries, the earliest works being the hymns of the female mystic Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār and the latest the 12th century Periya Purāṇam. Tirumuṟai VIII is devoted to the works of Māṇikkavācakar, and includes the Tiruvācakam, which is composed of 51 hymns, varying in length from 8 to 400 lines, and the Tirrukkōvaiyār, an extended erotic poem in the mode of the classical Tamil love poetry in 400 stanzas. Tirumuṟai IX consists of musical compositions called Tiruvicaippā, by several different

authors, which were sung in Cōla temples in 10th and 11th century, and it therefore postdates the **bhakti** period<sup>36</sup>. The tenth book is the Tirumantiram of Tirumūlar which is in a completely different style to **bhakti** and contains much which is tantric and yogic, although the author is mentioned by Cuntarar and is therefore probably of the same date<sup>37</sup>. Tirumuṛai XI covers both a wide range of poets and a wide span of time, but includes the hymns of Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār, that is, the Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu mūtta tiruppatikam, Tiruvirraṭṭai maṇimālai, and Arputattiruvantāti, as well as the Tirumurukāṛruppaṭai, dedicated to the Tamil God Murukaṅ, which also forms part of the classical Tamil anthology, the Pattuppāṭṭu.

The twelfth Tirumuṛai is the hagiographic Periya Purāṇam which was compiled in a period that followed on from the mystical hymns of the Nāyaṅmārs and the foundation of the philosophy of the Śaiva Siddhānta system, and cannot, therefore, be regarded as containing *prima facie* evidence for the Nāyaṅmārs but must be viewed as a reflection and interpretation of the **bhakti** movement by the later Śaiva tradition. The general framework for the Periya Purāṇam is Cuntarar's story of 62 saints, although Cēkkiḷār probably also took account of Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi's lives of the saints, the Tiruttonṭar Tiruvantāti, compiled in the 10thC and included in the eleventh Tirumuṛai, and, as a minister of state, it is likely that he also had access to various court records and documents.

The Periya Purāṇam is replete with legends and miracles concerning the individual **bhakti** poets which it seeks to authenticate by relating them to the actual hymns of the Nāyaṅmārs, although the hymns contain few references to the legendary events. However, one of the most important features of the text is the way in which it is structured. Cēkkiḷār interprets the **bhakti** movement in a systematic manner by recording and describing in chronological order the pilgrimages undertaken by the **bhaktas** to various Śiva shrines

throughout Tamiḷnāṭu, especially those of the Tēvāram trio, journeys which involved the composition of a hymn at almost every place visited<sup>38</sup>. The majority of the **bhakti** hymns contained in the Tirumuṟai are, in fact, dedicated to temples, and the structure of the Periya Purāṇam further emphasises the importance of the Tamil region to the southern Śaiva tradition, lending the land itself a sacred character.

### *Method and Sources*

An historical process is involved in the development of any religious tradition, the shape that tradition takes<sup>is</sup> dictated by the particular cultural circumstances which give rise to it, and the Śaiva **bhakti** tradition was the result of the distinctive political and cultural circumstances of the time and place from which it derived. Although inextricably a part of the Āryan tradition, **bhakti** was dependent, to a large extent, upon an indigenous cultural tradition peculiar to the Tamil region and originally quite alien from the ideology and practice of the northern tradition. By approaching the **bhakti** movement from an historical perspective and tracing the uniquely Tamil features it displays, I hope to show that it was the indigenous culture which provided the **bhakti** poets with the necessary dynamic element for the articulation of a highly charged emotional response to a personal, loving and gracious God, which they made accessible to the mass of the population by the use of the vernacular language of the region. This will involve the examination of a number of different strands of evidence, for, although the main evidence will be drawn from literary sources, both the classical Tamil texts and the **bhakti** hymns, in order to more fully illuminate the situation it will also be necessary to examine inscriptional, architectural, archaeological and ethnographic evidence. Because of the importance of the Tamil literary tradition, not only as a source of historical material but also as a contributory



factor in the poetic expression of the **bhakti** relationship itself, chapter 2 will be devoted to the classical Tamil literature and its association with **bhakti**, whilst the remaining three chapters each tackle a different aspect of the religious expression of **bhakti**, that is, the importance of shrines and temple worship in the tradition, the elements of possession and ecstatic devotion it displays, and, finally, the role of the sacred feminine.

1. Glenn E. Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Śiva*, South Asia Books, Columbia USA 1982, p.25.
2. Ibid.
3. Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, Oxford University Press 1983, p.26. For an in depth discussion on the origins of the term **bhakti** see pp.25-29.
4. Ibid. p.26.
5. Ibid. pp.26-27.
6. Ibid. p.28.
7. R.C.Zaehner, trans. and ed., *Hindu Scriptures*, Dent: London 1966, p.217.
8. The date for the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa is based on Hardy, 1983, p.40, citing the evidence of Hacker, *Prahlada - Werden und Wandlungen einer Idealgestalt - Beitrage zur Geschichte des Hinduismus*, 1959, p.111, note 1; p.224.
9. Hardy ibid. p.44 - he is referring to the influence of the religion of the Ālvārs but the ecstatic and emotional features of **bhakti** are equally well represented by the Śaiva **bhakti** movement.
10. See Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, Leiden 1973, p.140 and n.1.
11. Ibid. p.39.
12. A.K.Ramanujan and N.Cutler, "From Classicism to Bhakti" in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. Bardwell Smith, New Delhi MLBD 1983, pp.177-214, p.177.
13. For more information on the rise to prominence of the peasants of the Coromandel plain see Burton Stein "Brahman and Peasant in Early South Indian History" *Adyar Library Bulletin* 31-32, 1967-68, Supplement, pp.229-269.
14. The dates for these texts are those given by Zvelebil 1973, p.35, n.1.
15. Ibid. p.35, n.2.
16. Ibid.
17. Dated by Srinivasa Iyengar, *History of the Tamils*, University of Madras 1929, p.528.
18. Ibid. pp.437-8.
19. See Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press 1958, p.144, and *The Colas* Vol.I, University of Madras 1935, p.121, on the probable religious allegiance of the kaḷabhras.

20. See Samuel Beal's translation of the Chinese of Hsüang-Tsang, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, in 2 volumes, London 1884, Vol.2, p.227.

21. See Stein, 1967-68, pp.244-46.

22. Nilakanta Sastri, 1958, p.138.

23. The Śaiva Siddhānta school accepts 4 classes of literature as authoritative: Vedic literature; the 28 Śaiva Āgamas, considered to have been revealed by Śiva himself; the 12 Tirumurai; and 14 śāstras written by six different teachers, which attempted to incorporate the individual responses to the deity represented by the **bhakti** hymns into an organised theological system, although it was only with the third teacher, Meykaṇṭar, who wrote the Civañānapōtam in ca.1221, that any clear systematic theology was worked out. The philosophy maintains that there are three aspects to reality: **pati**, the deity, the all-pervasive and unchanging essence of the universe, considered immanent in the soul; **pacu**, the human soul; and **paca**, or worldly ties, which submerges the soul in the sensual realm, concealing the ultimate reality of the relationship with the deity from it. The human soul, however, can participate in the character of the divine, through progressive stages which overcome **paca**, and thereby attain the supreme liberating relationship with the deity, although ever remaining distinct. The stages by which the soul achieves divine knowledge, through the bestowal of Śiva's grace, reflect the **bhakti** expression of the relationship with the deity, the devotee progressing from the position of a servant to a master, to a child to a parent, then to a comrade, and finally to that of a lover. For a more detailed analysis of Śaiva Siddhānta and the various stages involved in the devotional relationship see Fred W. Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan*, Mouton Publishers, The Hague 1978, pp.88-103.

24. Zvelebil, 1973, p.198.

25. Cuntarar, for example, was married twice, to the temple dancer Paravai in Tiruvārūr, and to the Vellala woman Caṅkili in Tiruvorriyūr.

26. Zvelebil, 1973, p.186. Also Hardy, 1983, p.266.

27. I.V. Petersen, *Poems to Śiva*, Princeton University Press 1989, p.19.

28. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Pandiyan Kingdom*, London 1929, pp.53-54.

29. See Petersen, 1989, p.19.

30. Ibid.

31. 63 is an important Jain number and it is possible that Jain numerology influenced this total.

32. Yocum, 1982, p.55.

33. See Zvelebil, 1973, p.186.

34. The exact derivation of the term **patikam** is uncertain, but it may stem from the Sanskrit **padya** "poem", although Marr has postulated a number of other theories concerning the origins of the term - these include **pathika** or "traveller", ie. a pilgrim singing hymns; **pati** or "deity" because the hymns are dedicated to God; or the Tamil **pattu** or "ten", although the rule of ten verses cannot be strictly applied. See J.R.Marr, *The Eight Anthologies: A Study in Early Tamil Literature*, Institute of Asian Studies, Madras 1985, p.20.

35. For a complete résumé of the Tirumurai see Zvelebil, 1973, pp.188-89.

36. Ibid. p.186.

37. Ibid.

38. See Petersen "Lives of the Wandering Singers: Pilgrimage and Poetry in Tamil Śaivite Hagiography" *History of Religion* 22, 1982-83, pp.338-60.

The Classical Tamil Literature and its Relevance to Bhakti

The Tamil language, the medium through which the **bhakti** poets express themselves, is a member of a group of Dravidian languages which also includes Kannada, Tulu, Telugu and Malayālam. However, of these Dravidian languages, it is only Tamil for which there is evidence that it was employed as a literary language in the early historical period, before any major Āryanisation of the south, and, together with Sanskrit, it represents one of the two great classical languages of India. According to Zvelebil Tamil first began to be cultivated as a literary language as early as the 4th to 3rd centuries BCE<sup>1</sup>, evolving during this period from its pre-literary stage into a type of Tamil known as "Old Tamil". With the introduction of Aśoka's southern Brāhmī script into the region, ca.250BCE, it was employed for inscriptions, the earliest of which are two rock-inscriptions of Neṭuñceḷiyaṇ at Mangulam, near Maturai, which have been dated to the end of the 2nd century BCE<sup>2</sup>. A total of 76 inscriptions from 21 sites have been discovered in the Tamil region, mostly in caves, and the style of Tamil they exhibit suggests that they represent a type which was spoken by Buddhist and Jain monks. By the first century BCE, however, Tamil had developed a refined poetic language known as **ceyyuḷ**, of a different style to the inscriptions, and, although it was initially employed by the poets of an indigenous oral bardic tradition, it was this cultivated language which was to become standard throughout the Tamil region. According to Kailasapathy, "*the itinerant*



*life of the bards might have accentuated the process of spreading this bardic language, which soon became synonymous with the language itself. As carriers not only of ideas but of linguistic forms, the bards must have played a crucial role in shaping the standard Tamil and establishing it, at least among the articulate of the age"*<sup>3</sup>.

The literature which derives from this oral bardic tradition was based upon highly conventionalised and standardized formulae and themes which serve to lend it an overall unity in structure, expression and ideas, and it displays a remarkable degree of continuity across a wide span of time. It has, therefore, proved difficult to date accurately but, following Zvelebil<sup>4</sup>, it is probable that the first poems were composed between the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, and represent the start of an early classical period which continued until the 4th century CE, with the majority of the poems of the early period being composed between 100-250 CE<sup>5</sup>. This was followed by a later classical period, which shows more evidence of Āryan influence, culminating in the 6th-7th century with the Tirumurukārruppaṭai and the first Tamil epic, the Cilappatikāram. This literature was transmitted orally for centuries, before at least some of it was compiled into individual anthologies and "songs" around the middle of the 8th century<sup>6</sup>, "*as soon as it ceased to be a living, orally transmitted poetry for audience appreciation*"<sup>7</sup>. The poetry was finally codified into two great anthologies, the Eṭṭuttokai or "Eight Collections" and the Pattuppāṭṭu or "Ten Songs", in the 13th or 14th century CE<sup>8</sup>, and it forms the corpus of classical Tamil literature which came to be known as the Caṅkam literature<sup>9</sup>.

### *The Bardic Poets*

The extant anthologies and songs comprise 2389 poems, which vary in length from 4 to 800 lines. Of these 100 are anonymous and the remainder are attributed to 461 poets, known by either name or

epithet. The poets were of both sexes and from all classes of society. They belonged to professional, vocational groups which travelled throughout the Tamil country singing and entertaining in the villages and in royal courts. They received a bardic training, probably at different schools with different traditions, learning their poetic skills by imitation and practice. Various different bardic groups included minstrels (**pāṇar**), dancing minstrels (**kūttar**), war-bards (**porunar**), heralds (**akavunar**), female dancers and singers (**viraliyar**), and learned or wise men (**pulavar**). Of particular interest are the poets classed as **pulavar**<sup>10</sup> who, unlike the other bardic groups, appear to have been highly regarded by Tamil society and associated with profound knowledge and learning rather than entertainment. *Purāṇānūru* 72:13-16 gives some idea of the respect which this class of poet commanded:

*"If I (King Neṭuñceliyaṇ) break this oath, let the poets (pulavar) honoured by the whole world, chief among whom is the well-informed and wise Murutaṇ of Māṅkuṭi, quit me and my kingdom as unworthy of their song."*<sup>11</sup>

The term **pulavar** derives from **pulam** "sense, sensation, wisdom, knowledge" and Kailasapathy has suggested that the designation **pulavar** is indicative of the fact that "*ideas of wisdom, knowledge and learning were considered inherent in the person of the poet*"<sup>12</sup>. That the term had an implicit religious character as it was applied in the earliest literature is further re-enforced in the *Tirumurukāruppaṭai* where **pulavar** is directly associated with the deity, Murukaṇ: he is described as "the wise one (**pulavar**) knowing the lore" (TMP 261), the "lion among the wise ones (**pulavar**)" (TMP 268) and "the incomparable wise one (**pulavar**)" (TMP 280)<sup>13</sup>. The TMP was also originally known as the *Pulavarāruppaṭai*, and Murukaṇ himself is traditionally held by Tamils to be the "prince of poets", evidence which, according to Kailasapathy, points to the fact



that the **pulavars** were in fact closely connected with the cult of Murukan<sup>14</sup>. It is also of some significance that, with the progressive influence of Āryan religion upon Tamil culture, brahmans were included in this category<sup>15</sup>, again demonstrating that there was a tacit association between the **pulavars** and religious concerns.

By the 5th and 6th centuries CE, the period of Buddhist and Jain hegemony in the south, religious poets came to predominate in the art of poetry in Tamiḷnāṭu. The northern traditions employed the poetic medium as a means for the dissemination of doctrine, which resulted in the production of a large amount of sententious and didactic verse, quite foreign to the earlier Tamil bardic poetry, and a major consequence of the moralising attitudes displayed in these works was a general decline in the Tamil bardic groups. However, within the indigenous tradition one group, the **pulavars**, rose to prominence and, although the impetus for more religiously inspired poetry may have been largely due to the reformist attitudes of the northern traditions, what the foregoing evidence indicates is that learned poets of a definite religious character were not the prerogative of Āryan culture but were part of the indigenous tradition even in the earliest period. Although Āryan influence may have provided the impetus for the ascendancy of these poets they were to bring their own cultural awareness to bear upon the expression of divinity, and it is in the poetry of the **pulavars** that we find the first intimations of the religious attitude of emotional **bhakti**.

### *The Tolkāppiyam*

The classical literature was standardized and classified in the Tolkāppiyam, a grammatical treatise consisting of three sections: the Eḷuttatikāram, which deals with phonology; the Collatikāram, which deals with semantics, morphology, etymology and syntax; and the Poruḷatikāram, which deals with the poetic conventions of the ancient

literature<sup>16</sup>. According to Zvelebil the original text of the Tolkāppiyam, represented by the first two sections minus later interpolations, is the earliest theoretical work in Tamil, and he assigns it to between the second and first centuries BCE, although, even in its earliest layers, there is evidence of a degree of Āryan influence, including knowledge of the Sanskrit authors Pāṇini and Patañjali<sup>17</sup>. The third section, the Poruḷatikāram, did not receive its final redaction until the end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century CE, and must, therefore, be regarded as a reflection, rather than an accurate representation, of the earlier literary practices. It is, nevertheless, important as an interpretive<sup>at</sup> text for understanding the early poetry, dealing with the subject-matter of the bardic literature and the conventions to be observed in a series of short verse sayings (Tamil: **cūttiram**; Sanskrit: **sūtra**) which form the basis of the text. Although the influence of the ideological suppositions of Jainism and Buddhism are apparent<sup>18</sup>, the final and definitive version may have been compiled in response to the threat posed to the indigenous bardic tradition by these religions because, in essence, it represents the analysis of a poetic tradition peculiar to the Tamil country.

### *The Poetic Structure*

The Poruḷatikāram divides the subject-matter of the classical literature into two main categories known as **akam**, or love-poetry, and **puram**, or praise-poetry, both of which were to influence **bhakti** at the poetic and the conceptual level.

### *Akam*

**Akam** (literally "inside") is a poetic genre which deals with the intimacies of human life, the range of passions and emotions involved in the relationship of love between man and woman, encompassing both pre-marital and secret love, or **kaḷavu**, and post-marital love, or

**karpu**<sup>19</sup>. Based around a number of idealised and anonymous characters (the hero, heroine, hero's friend or messenger, heroine's friend, foster-mother, passers-by) **akam** is highly conventionalised, making use of natural imagery to provide the symbolic language for the human emotions involved in five different phases of love<sup>20</sup>. According to Ramanujan in **akam** "*the actual objective landscapes of the Tamil country become the interior landscape of Tamil poetry*"<sup>21</sup>.

**Akam** divides nature into five different landscapes - the **aintinai** or **akattinai** - each of which is correlated to one of the five human emotive circumstances, known as the **uripporuḷ**, each landscape designated by the name of a flower found growing there<sup>22</sup>:

<u>Flower</u>	<u>Landscape</u>	<u>Emotive Attribute</u>
<b>kuriñci</b>	mountains	the sexual union of the lovers
<b>mullai</b>	forest, pasture	patient waiting of the wife
<b>marutam</b>	cultivated land	jealous sulking of the wife, usually because of her husband's infidelity
<b>neytal</b>	seashore	anxious waiting, the agony of separation
<b>pālai</b>	wasteland	separation, hardship, elopement.

Further poetic conventions function within the **akattinai** structure, each landscape having a number of typical features, the **karupporuḷ**, which include trees, birds, animals, insects, peoples and their associated occupations, and the **mutalpporuḷ**, which include divisions of time and space. The separation of these features is, however, not rigid - "*birds and beasts of one landscape may sometimes appear in others...; time and place appropriate to one genre may be fused with...another*" (Porul 19<sup>23</sup>).

An overall unity is lent to the structure of individual poems by a further sub-division of the **tinai**s into various themes, or **turai**, each poem, in both the **akam** and **puram** genres, being based around a

specific topic given in the colophon: for example, a **turai** of **kuriñci** could be "*the heroine's rejection of a present from the hero*", or for **pālai** "*the speech of the mother after the elopement of the daughter*"<sup>24</sup>.

Within the general framework of **akam** the poet was able to employ two poetic devices to impart further human meaning into the external landscape, either indirectly and with great subtlety through the use of suggestion (**iraicci**), or more explicitly through the use of metaphor (**uvamai**), exploiting the natural environment to both imply and symbolise human love, and, in a concise and concentrated form, creating poetry out of the conventionalised patterns. The following example of an **akam** poem illustrates the depth of meaning which the poets achieved:

*"Bigger than earth certainly, higher than the sky,  
more unfathomable than the waters  
is love for this man (nāṭan)  
of the mountain slopes  
where bees make rich honey  
from the flowers of the kuriñci  
that has such black stalks"*

Kurun.3<sup>25</sup>

In this poem, in which the heroine is speaking, the phase of love is lover's union, associated with the **kuriñci tinaṭai**, and the **karu** are all appropriate to this setting - the bees, the honey, the mountain-chief (**nāṭan**) and the **kuriñci** flowers are all features of the mountain landscape. Within this setting the poet employs the device of **uvamai** to express the heroine's love for the hero, explicitly comparing it to the vastness and depth of the natural phenomena of earth, sky and waters, but also suggesting a deeper meaning, through the device of **iraicci**, whereby the black-stalked flowers represent the heroine herself, and the action of honey-gathering the sexual intimacy of the two lovers.

The uniquely Tamil poetic phenomenon of **akam** was inherited



by the **bhakti** poets and many of their songs are influenced by its symbolic structure, in particular the correlation of emotion and landscape, although for the Nāyanmārs the conventions function to symbolise and describe their experience of God. By addressing their poems to Śiva as the Beloved male the **bhaktas** empathize with the female, and may take the part of the heroine as the woman-in-love, the mother or girlfriend, but, with the exception of Māṇikkavācakar's Tirukkōvaiyār, never the role of the male. As such the **akam** love relationship represents the perfect idiom for the expression of love between the devotee and God, not only in union but in the agony of separation as well. To varying degrees, dependent upon the individual poet, they experience all five phases of love in their relationship with the deity - union, patient waiting, jealous sulking, anxiety and hardship - although they do not necessarily conform to the conventional landscape for each emotional state. As we have seen, the Tolkāppiyam makes allowance for features from different landscapes to appear in a single poem, probably because the classical literature itself displays a degree of flexibility on this matter, but Katherine Young has also shown that, by assimilating the five **uri** into specific places associated with the deity, these become instead "*special places with the qualities of all the tiṇais*"<sup>26</sup>.

The contribution of the structure and conventions of **akam** to the poetic level of the Nāyanmārs' hymns is well illustrated by the following example, from a hymn by Campantar, in which the poet combines the **tiṇais** of **kuriñci** and **mullai** to impart his experience of God at the hill shrine of Aṇṇamālai to an implied audience of fellow devotees:

*"Karma will end  
for those who meditate on the feet,  
adorned by beautiful anklets,  
of the Lord in Aṇṇamālai in whose woods wild bulls mate with  
cows,*

*when the mango branch,  
let go by a male ape who's plucked its honey-sweet fruit,  
touches the dark rain cloud  
and small drops strike the mountain's rocky cliffs."*

Cam.I.10.2.<sup>27</sup>

The setting in this hymn is **kuriñci**, the **tiñai** of lover's union, in this instance appropriate to the actual location of the shrine, although this is not always the case. The emotive circumstance of **kuriñci** is indicated metaphorically (**uvamai**) by the mating of the bulls and cows, and suggested (**iraicci**) by the male ape, a **karu** of the mountain **tiñai**, plucking the sweet mango fruit. However, the rainy season is associated with **mullai**, patient waiting of the wife for the return of the lover after an absence, and here the rain striking the mountain appears to imply a mood of absence, and the pain and suffering of the lover on account of that absence, as well as a mood of expectation, of the imminent return of the lover, associated with the arrival of the rains in **akam** poetry. In this verse, therefore, the **akam** conventions function to describe the devotee's experience of God, and, through the use of poetical rather than mythical symbols the poet evokes both a memory of past intimacy with the deity and a longing for that state again, a deep emotional mood of absence and erotic union.

### *Puram*

**Puram** (literally "outside") is a poetic genre which deals with external affairs, especially the heroic deeds and exploits of the Tamil kings and chieftains, and allows names of places and people, functioning as a poetic medium in a real society. **Puram** is divided by the Tolkāppiyam into seven sub-divisions, the **tiñai** of **veṭci** (cattle-raid), **vañci** (preparation for war), **uliñai** (~~serge~~), **tumpai** (battle), **vākai** (victory, achievement), **kāñci** (struggle, endurance), and **pāṭāṇ**

(elegy or praise).

The **pāṭāṇ tīṇai** in particular was important in the formation of **bhakti**. It is replete with conventional formulae and epithets<sup>28</sup> which serve to stress the might, valour and supremacy of the king, a mode of royal praise which was utilised by the **bhakti** poets to express their relationship with Śiva as one between master and servant. It also provided the ideal language for the presentation of the mythological deeds and attributes of Śiva, representing the transposition of heroic feats once pertinent to human rulers onto the divine. Indeed, terms originally applied to the human rulers of Tamiḷnāṭu were gradually transposed onto the divine throughout the classical period, and in the **bhakti** hymns Śiva is most frequently addressed as **kō**, **kōmāṇ**, **perumāṇ** (king, ruler), **irai** ("chief, master, elder, brother, husband, lord, king", **iraivan** ("he who is highest"), **nampi** (prince), and **īcaṇ**, **pirāṇ**, **empirāṇ** (our lord, master), whilst the devotees refer to themselves as **aṭiyār** (slaves) and **tonṭar** (servants)<sup>29</sup>.

On rare occasions in **puram** literature the poet does not compliment and praise his sovereign but criticises and rebukes him for being uncharitable, a practice exhibited in a number of the hymns of Cuntarar, who frequently mocks and rebukes Śiva, employing sarcasm and irony in his poetry, holding the deity responsible for many of the calamities which befall him. For example, in Cun VII.95.3., the poet first employs a **karu** of **akam**, the **anril** birds, which symbolize fidelity, in a sarcastic manner, and then proceeds to blame Śiva for his blindness, traditionally held to be the result of breaking a vow to Śiva never to leave his second wife, Caṅkili of Tiruvorriyūr:

*"You who dwell in Ārūr, to whose groves  
anril birds flock every day!  
What do you care if your servant,  
who tirelessly sings your praise,  
clinging to you like a calf at the cow's flowing teats,  
loses his sight, runs into hills,  
falls into a pit?*



*May you live long, my Lord!"*  
Cun.VII.95.3.<sup>30</sup>

The **puram** genre also encompasses the **ārruppaṭai** or "guide" poem, in which one bard directs another to a beneficent king or chieftain, urging him to seek his livelihood by visiting the court of this patron. In the course of the poem the bard not only praises the king's generosity to those who visit his court to perform their art, but gives vivid and glorious descriptions of the scenery of the kingdom. The **bhakti** poets describe various places associated with Śiva in a similar vein, as though identifying the deity with a worldly kingdom similar to that of a local chief who rules over a particular place and safeguards his subjects through his heroism and largesse, thereby implying both the deity's immanent nature and an ability to act within the world on behalf of his devotees. It is a feature of the more religiously inspired Caṅkam texts, the Paripāṭal, and, more especially, the TMP, which was composed in the form of an **ārruppaṭai**, to locate the deity Murukan at specific named places in the Tamil countryside, praising him as they would a human sovereign. However, both these poems also employ the **akattiṇai** design of **akam** in their descriptions of the beauty of Murukan's kingdom, thus correlating landscape and human emotions. Although this was to be of prime importance in the developed **bhakti** understanding of God, this level of meaning is entirely absent from the **ārruppaṭai** literature as a whole, where natural description is employed for the purpose of praise.

In **puram** poetry the Caṅkam bards celebrate and exalt their kings in the hope of rewards in the form of gold and other gifts, and in the **bhakti** hymns the Nāyaṇmārs employ the same phraseology to praise Śiva, although the rewards they seek are spiritual rather than material. However, although the **puram** genre provided the ideal idiom for the relationship between the devotee and deity as one of

servant and master, and for the expression of Śiva's mythological attributes and deeds, in many ways it represents no more than the transference of the standardized formulae and epithets of a bardic tradition from the human to the divine plane, a process which is not unique to southern India. **Puram** lacks both the subtlety and the depth of meaning which the **akam** genre allows, having none of the expressive capacity whereby descriptions of nature are used to symbolise human emotions. It is the **akam** genre which was to contribute, through its unique structure, the possibility of the poetic expression of profound religious feelings, whilst at the same time identifying the Supreme deity with the Tamil land itself. Both genres, however, reflect a unified cultural perception of the universe, which was to influence the conceptual understanding of the **bhaktas**, and shape their perception of the deity.

#### *Religious Features in the Early Caṅkam Texts*

The main concern of the early bardic literature was with the poetic expression of the idealised relationship of love between anonymous heroes and heroines, and to praise and glorify the illustrious deeds of kings and chieftains, concentrating on the **cāṇrōr** or "noble" man, a fact which has led to the poetry being perceived as predominantly secular in outlook<sup>31</sup>. However, despite the heroic framework of the early Caṅkam texts, they do reflect the life of an entire culture, and provide information regarding the religious beliefs and practices of the early Tamils as a whole, including the ordinary people, the non-heroes or **ilicinar**, literally "a low, uncivilised person"<sup>32</sup>, probably representative of the mass of the Tamil population. Although much of this evidence will be expanded upon in the course of this thesis, the following will serve as an introduction to the major religious concepts of the early Tamil tradition, the indigenous ideological preconditions for the development of **bhakti**.

### *Immortality:*

For the heroic class the main concern was with their own immortality, which was conferred upon them both by the songs of the bards and also by the glory and fame (**pukal**) they achieved in battle. On the battle-field fame and renown were considered more important than life: *"For fame they would give their very lives; against blame even the entire world they would not have"* (Puran.36<sup>33</sup>). The renown they achieved for their valiant deeds was deemed more enduring than life itself: *"They died having set up their fame on a firm basis"* (Puran.165:2<sup>34</sup>). According to Mal.553, the lives of those who died without winning fame were to no avail, and their names were forgotten<sup>35</sup>. Those who died an heroic and fearless death were believed to attain the abode of heaven: *"Having obtained renown (in this world) you obtain the abode of heaven"* (Puran.213:9-10); *"To enter the heaven with a body hacked by long blades in a furious battle"* (Puran.341:14-15); *"should a person fall in battle, he will enjoy the bliss of marriage with the spotless maidens in heaven"* (Puran.287:10-12<sup>36</sup>). The designations for the realm of "heaven" itself reveal that it was envisioned in terms of glory and honour; it is variously called *"the world of the noble ones"* (Puran.229:22, 240:6), *"the world of the great"* (Puran.174:20, 213:10), *"the world of renown"* and *"the world of high position"* amongst others<sup>37</sup>.

### *Religious Terms*

Immortality in heaven seems to have been available only to the heroic class, but the divine was also conceived of as present in the phenomenal world and available to all. As we have already seen designations which were initially applied to tribal kings and chiefs, such as **irai**, **iraivan**, and **kō**, became terms for god, and, although Zvelebil<sup>38</sup> has suggested that **irai** is the original Tamil term for god,

it lacks any sense of divinity in the early literature, only acquiring such a meaning with the gradual transposition of ideas concerning human sovereignty onto to the divine. However, there are two terms which occur in the earliest literature which do appear to represent early designations for the divine, **kaṭavuḷ** and **aṇaṇku**.

### **Kaṭavuḷ:**

The term **kaṭavuḷ** occurs frequently throughout the classical literature although it is particularly prevalent in the Pattuppāṭṭu. Zvelebil has defined it as "*the immanence that transcends*" from the root **kaṭa** "to transcend" and **uḷ** "inside, interior, heart, mind", and sees it as representing a significant early conceptual achievement<sup>39</sup>. However, Hardy believes that this definition bears the mark of a medieval philosophical system of categories and that, in its earliest form, **kaṭavuḷ** meant simply the "supernatural being", and consequently the "deity to be worshipped"<sup>40</sup>. The texts bear out the less abstract definition of **kaṭavuḷ**. In Nar̥.216.6, for example, **kaṭavuḷ** refers to the god resident in the **vēṇkai** tree and in Akan.372:1 it refers to the god resident in a hillside<sup>41</sup>. It was also occasionally associated with a named deity: for example, in Akan.152:17 and Kurun.208,209 it is associated with Murukan̄, and in Akan.9 and Kali.1, it is associated with Śiva<sup>42</sup>.

### **Aṇaṇku:**

**Aṇaṇku** is employed as both a verb and a noun and, in the earliest texts, it has a variety of different meanings. As a verb its meaning is "to afflict, to suffer, to cause distress, to charm, to defeat, to excel" and, as a noun, it represents a quality perceived in various entities, such as strength, sexuality, the vastness of a panorama, the gruesome nature of the battlefield, and it can also, metonymically, refer to the entity itself, in particular a king or a woman. **Aṇaṇku** is



both the cause and its effect, although in the earlier texts it is usually employed as the cause, a source of distress. For example, in *Puṛan*.14 a king's chest is said to cause distress (**aṇaṅku**) to women<sup>43</sup>, and in *Kali*.56 a woman's shoulders are a source of distress (**aṇaṅku**) to those who look at her<sup>44</sup>. It is directly connected with other designations for the divine in, for example, *Naṛr*.358 where it is associated with **kaṭavuḷ** which is said to cause distress (**aṇaṅku**) to the heroine of the poem<sup>45</sup>, and in *Akan*.98 where *Murukaṇ* is said to cause (**aṇaṅku**) the heroine's love-sickness<sup>46</sup>. However, by the 6th century CE the very broad category of **aṇaṅku** had become much more restricted, and was most frequently employed as a designation for a sacred power believed to inhere in women. According to V.S.Rajam **aṇaṅku** underwent a semantic change over time, and, by the time of the Epics, had "*narrowed down from a multi-dimensional concept of diverse significance to a single dimensional concept of a celestial female*"<sup>47</sup>.

### *The Tamil God Murukaṇ*

There are few named deities in the early classical literature but the divine is personified, most frequently as the God *Murukaṇ*, although there are a number of references to another God, *Māyōṇ* (also known as *Tirumāl*), and to the Goddess, *Koṛṛavai*.

In the earliest texts the names for *Murukaṇ* tend to be abstract nouns such as Youth (*Tivā*), Beauty (*Piṇ*), and Greatness (*Jīvaka*). *Murukaṇ* itself is derived from **muruku** "*he who possesses youth and beauty*"<sup>48</sup>, and he is also known as *Ceyyōṇ* (Red or Redness, the Son or Young One, the Distant One), *Cevvēḷ* (the Great Beautiful Hero), and *Neṭuvēḷ* (the Great Exalted One).

In the early poetry *Murukaṇ* is associated with the hills and mountains of the **kuṛiñci** landscape, and the people of these hills. He is the hunter **par excellence**, the "*god on the mountain slopes where*

*the black pepper grows*" (Aiñk.243.1<sup>49</sup>), later to become the lover of Valli, daughter of the mountains - in Nar̥.82.4., for example, Valli is described as Murukan's consort although in the earliest meaning of the term **valli** is creeper<sup>50</sup>. Murukan's abode is in trees, particularly the **kaṭampu** - "...*Neṭuvēḷ who lives in the kaṭampu*" (Perump.75<sup>51</sup>) - and his worship is ritualistic rather than contemplative, involving music and dancing, and offerings of flowers, red millet, rice, sandal paste, honey and blood. The worshippers are frequently female, and he is called upon to dispel illness and distress, to bring fertility, and, closely associated with the idea of fertility, rain. Although Murukan later came to represent a **karu** of the **kuriñci** landscape, whilst the deities Māyōṇ, Indra, Varuṇa and Kor̥ravai were associated with **mullai**, **marutam**, **neytal**, and **pālai** respectively, Hardy<sup>52</sup> has argued that the fact that these deities are nearly or completely absent from the older **akam** poems, and that Murukan appears to embody several features associated with the mountain landscape, such as youth and beauty, in his very nature, indicates that he is in fact original to that landscape, a God of the mountains from an early period.

Murukan is also the God of war, the "*victorious hero of terrible wrath*" (Pat.11:6), whose fury is compared to that of kings - for example, "*He is the son of Iḷaiyōṇ, famed for his beautiful chariots. A dreaded chief (he is), whose wrath is like Murukan's ire*" (Poru.130-31<sup>53</sup>). By the 4th or 5th century CE Murukan was accredited with the attributes of a War-god, acquiring most of the ten insignia associated with kingship, such as a banner, a weapon, a war-drum and an elephant<sup>54</sup>. According to Clothey Murukan's role as a War-god represents his increasing popularity within Tamil society as a whole, a "universalization" of a deity originally restricted to the hill tribes, possibly due to the progressive urbanization of the Tamil population and a consequently greater concern with territorial defence. It is possible that Murukan was first a deity of the people of the hills who

was adapted to Tamil culture as a whole, and that it was only in his adoption as a pan-Tamil God that he became "like a king" and began to take on the character of a War-god, but, although Clothey believes the literature "hints" at such a development<sup>55</sup>, it is difficult to discern and cannot be conclusively proven.

According to Hardy, Murukan̄, unlike Māyōn̄, the other major deity of the early Tamils who came to be directly identified with Viṣṇu, was never directly associated with Śiva, and he believes the process by which Śiva came to prominence in the southern **bhakti** polarization of Viṣṇu/Māyōn̄:Śiva to be "*one of the major unsolved problems of Southern religious history...the Northern, sectarian texts (with the polarity Viṣṇu:Śiva) must have been responsible, though probably not exclusively, for the Southern developments*"<sup>56</sup>. However, although the process whereby Śiva became one of the two Supreme deities of South India remains mysterious, a number of facets of Murukan̄'s character recall Śiva, including his ferocious aspect as the God of war and his erotic dimension as the lover of Vaḷḷi. By the late classical period Murukan̄ had been identified with Skanda, Śiva's mythological son, who himself embodies youth and beauty, and, although there are few references to Murukan̄ in the **bhakti** hymns, there is evidence which suggests an implicit identification between the two deities - that they were, in fact, conceived to be intimately connected by the Śaiva **bhaktas**. For example, in a hymn by Campantar we find:

*"Let us go to Mutukunru  
 Where maidens with flowers in their dark hair  
 Sing the praise of Murukan̄  
 in the sacred **kuriñci** mode.  
 Let us go to the place of the bull-bannered Lord,  
 the mountain's son-in-law,  
 Aran̄ whom the Jains and Buddhists do not know."  
 Cam.I.12.10<sup>57</sup>*

Although the religious element is limited and subordinate to the main purpose of the early Caṅkam texts, they indicate a society that was not secular but this-worldly. For the heroic class life-after-death was conceived of in the same terms as their earthly existence, that is in terms of heroism and renown, and the descriptions of the warriors' "heaven" indicate that it was envisioned as a physical place rather than an abstraction. Throughout the early literature there is a general lack of abstraction, and the feeling is of divine immanence, a belief that the divine was manifested in natural phenomena, and an ability on the behalf of the divine to act within the world, here-and-now. As the personified deity, the texts stress Murukan's immanence rather than his transcendence, a God to be worshipped physically and ritualistically, rather than contemplatively, who could bring about positive results in the human sphere.

### *Transitional Literature*

There are two late Caṅkam texts, the Paripāṭal and the Tirumurukāruppaṭai, which mark the end of the classical age of Tamil literature, and contain the first textual evidence for the religious attitude of **bhakti** in South India. They represent a change in the religious outlook, a sudden flowering of religious consciousness.

### *The Paripāṭal*

The Paripāṭal, which forms part of the Eṭṭuttokai anthology, is a collection of poems named after the metre in which it was composed, and each individual poem is accompanied by a colophon, giving information on the subject of the poem, the author, the melody (**paṇ**) to which it was set, and the composer of the music, indicating that they were meant to be sung. It displays a general awareness of the Vedas and Brahmanism, and contains a number of Āryan loanwords



and grammatical innovations, as well as frequent allusions to Purāṇic myths including the Churning of the Ocean and the Destruction of the Three Cities. It is, therefore, universally acknowledged by Tamil scholars to be of a later date than the other works in the Eṭṭuttokai, with the exception of the Kalittokai, and has been placed between the 5th and 7th centuries CE<sup>58</sup>.

The extant anthology is fragmentary, with only twenty-four out of an original seventy poems remaining in full, and, of these, seven are dedicated to the God Tirumāl (Māyōṇ), eight to Cevvēḷ (Murukaṇ), and nine to the river Vaikai, the hymns to the two deities representing the first religiously inspired works in Tamil. It contains a mixture of both **akam** and **puram** themes, the **akam** theme predominating in poems to the River Vaikai and in Pari.8 to Cevvēḷ, and the **puram** theme, particularly the **pāṭāṇ tiṇai**, predominating in the hymns to Tirumāl, whilst a number of hymns contain both genres.

There are frequent allusions in the Cevvēḷ hymns<sup>59</sup> to the Purāṇic mythology of Skanda which contain both Āryan and uniquely Tamil motifs. Pari.5 includes a version of the birth of Murukaṇ which is similar to the account of the birth of Skanda in the Rāmāyaṇa, whilst Pari.9 relates the terrestrial marriage of Murukaṇ and Vaḷḷi, the daughter of the mountain tribes, at Paraṅkuṇram, following which a comic argument starts between his new wife and his heavenly consort, Devasenā, the daughter of Indra, and their companions, over Murukaṇ. By incorporating both Devasenā and Vaḷḷi as consorts this myth emphasises Murukaṇ's place amongst the Gods of the Purāṇic tradition, but it also stresses his role as God of the mountains and of love, his relationship with Vaḷḷi having analogies with the lover of **akam** poetry, and their terrestrial marriage also serving to emphasise his divine immanence rather than his transcendence.

The splendour of Murukaṇ's hill shrine at Paraṅkuṇram is an important theme in the Cevvēḷ hymns, and the poets glorify it in a

similar manner to **puram** descriptions of the king's domain, whilst incorporating many features of the **akattiṇai** design of **akam**. In Pari.8, for example, the poet utilizes a secular **akam** situation to express devotional love for Murukan, employing, for the first time in the Tamil tradition, the conventions of the **akam** genre with an explicit religious intention. The setting for this song is in agricultural land and the city, the **tiṇai** of **marutam**, and the lover is attempting a reconciliation with his wife, having betrayed her with prostitutes, a common theme in **akam**. Descriptions of Murukan's hill shrine are utilised to evoke the former perfection of the couple's love, Paraṅkunram representing the ideal **kuriñci** landscape and therefore the ideal of love. The religious significance of the song is imparted in lines 45f when Paraṅkunram, and, by analogy, Murukan himself, is said to grant the bliss of love-making<sup>60</sup> which the lover's seek, and, following the successful reconciliation of their relationship, they go on pilgrimage to Paraṅkunram to offer worship to the deity:

*"On cool Paraṅkunram where one worships the feet of Murukan, we shall cover them with many flowers, offer oblations to eat, let (Him) hear music, and raise (the beat of) the kiṇai drum"<sup>61</sup>*

The integration of **akam** and Murukan religion in the Paripāṭal, however, lacks the spiritual meaning of the later **bhakti** poets - it is not an intense personal relationship between the devotee and the deity that is portrayed but the blessings granted by God to a very human relationship.

Descriptions of worship in the Paripāṭal emphasise the ritualistic dimension of the Murukan cult and the physicality of his worship. Pari.5 contains a vivid description of pilgrims from Maturai taking sandal paste, incense, lamps, flowers, drums, a bell and an axe to Paraṅkunram in order to worship Murukan, and in Pari.9, there is a long and detailed description of the visit to the shrine of the Pāṇṭiyan King of Maturai in great procession in order to worship Murukan,

further associating the deity and his shrine with the royal house of Maturai. The description in Pari.8 of devotees offering worship to Murukan's feet is comparable to the manner in which the **bhaktas** approach Śiva's feet. The Nāyanmārs frequently invoke the deity's feet as symbols of divine grace<sup>62</sup>, and venerate Śiva with similar offerings - Māṇikkavācakar, for example, describes Śiva's devotees as "*heavenly slaves who serve Your flowery feet*"<sup>63</sup>, and Campantar describes his worshippers as "*servants who bring water and flowers every day, always singing the praises of your golden feet...*"<sup>64</sup>.

### *The Tirumurukārruppaṭai*

The Tirumurukārruppaṭai or "Guide to Lord Murukan" is the first text in Tamil that is totally and exclusively devoted to one deity, and, although it forms part of the **Pattuppāṭṭu**, its importance to Śaiva devotees is testified by its inclusion in the eleventh Tirumurai of the Śaiva **bhakti** canon, again indicating an implicit identification between the two deities by Śaivites. The date of the TMP is still a matter of some debate. Zvelebil has dated it variously, in the same text, to both ca.550-600 CE<sup>65</sup>, and ca.700-800 CE<sup>66</sup>, the more mature expression of religious devotion in the text, the number of Āryan loanwords, late forms, and innovations of language, indicating that it post-dates the Paripāṭal. The later date is based on the authorship of the text which is attributed to Nakkīrar, who may be the same as the commentator on Iraiyaṇār's Akapporuḷ, the source of the Caṅkam legend, whom Zvelebil assigns to the 8th CCE<sup>67</sup>. However, this has not been conclusively proven and the shrine-oriented character of the text, which is of a less mature nature than that of the developed **bhakti** tradition, the fact that the text is so closely associated with the cult of Murukan and the **pulavars**, the indigenous Tamil poets (see above pp.21-22), and that literary allusions to

Murukan declined markedly with the ascendancy of Viṣṇu and Śiva until the medieval period, suggests that the earlier date is the more likely.

The TMP is in the **akaval** metre, in six parts of unequal length, each dedicated to a particular shrine of Murukan, and takes the form of an **ār\_ruppatai**, although the role of the two bards is taken by two of Murukan's devotees, one devotee directing the other one to various shrines of Murukan throughout Tamiḷnāṭu, praising the God as though he were his patron-king. Like the Paripāṭal, it contains both Brahmanical and Tamil elements, mentioning the Vedas, sages and twice-born, as well as the **vēlan**, the indigenous shaman of Murukan's cult (see below Chp.4), and the demoness who dances wildly on the gruesome battlefields of the Tamil land. The mythological allusions represent a fusion of Āryan and Tamil motifs, and Murukan is again identified with Skanda - in Chapter Two, for instance, Murukan is described as six-faced and twelve-armed, each face being allotted a specific function, including watching over the brahman priests as they perform sacrifices, whilst the sixth face enjoys Vaḷḷi, the deity's temporal, indigenous Tamil wife.

The TMP contains descriptions of both Brahmanical and Tamil religious ritual, the latter stressing the vitality and enthusiasm of Murukan's worship, including a number of ecstatic features such as dance and the imbibing of intoxicating liquor (see below Chapter 4). Many forms of Murukan's worship involve both men and women, and there is a remarkable similarity between the vivid description of the female worshippers in the text to descriptions of female devotees in some of the **bhakti** hymns. For example:

*"On their young breasts  
Shaped like unopened kongu buds is smeared  
As tho sweet-smelling marutham blooms were piled,  
Fine coloured scented sandal paste prepared  
By grinding strong hard fragrant sandalwood.*



*O'er it they spread the pollens fine of blooms  
Of vengai fully blown."*

TMP lines 52-58<sup>68</sup>

*"...on the rich streets of great Mayilai,  
town of beautiful young women with bracelets,  
and town of our Lord in Kapālīccaram temple,  
the flawless celebration of the ancient Kārttikai feast  
at which young girls  
with sandal paste on their breasts  
light many lamps?"*

Cam.II.183.3.<sup>69</sup>

Each shrine is intimately connected with a local manifestation of Murukan, and, despite the **puram** framework of the poem, this aspect of the text represents the continuation of the **akattiṇai** conventions associating certain places with specific attributes. As the God of the mountain landscape it is appropriate that the poet should employ the **karu** of the **kuriñci** landscape in his descriptions of Murukan's domain, and they serve to locate the deity in the surrounding landscape, emphasising his intimate connection with the land. Chapter One, for example, is dedicated to Paraṅkunram which it describes as a verdant hill abounding with springs and waterfalls, typical features of the **kuriñci** landscape. It is the place where:

*"...hum swarms of bright-winged bees.  
They sleep at night in lotus flowers that bloom  
On thorny stalks and awake at dawn and buzz  
Around the honey-scented neithal blooms."*

TMP 111-114<sup>70</sup>

Fred Clothey has questioned whether the present hill known as Tiruparaṅkunram is the same as the hill described in the TMP because it is dry and arid, and therefore inconsistent with the description<sup>71</sup>, but it seems more likely that the physical reality of the scenery is of secondary importance to the poetic conventions demanded by the **kuriñci tiṇai**.

Towards the end of the TMP, in a passage which occurs after a

worshipper has offered praise to Murukan, there is the first direct literary expression in Tamil for a relationship of love between God and man, and, as a result of that relationship, the possibility of divine salvation:

*"He'll then assume a form of power divine  
And towering to the skies, but will conceal  
His ancient face divine quite from thy sight,  
And only show his ancient youthful form  
Diffusing fragrance sweet. He will then say  
In choice and loving words, 'Remove thy fear.  
I know thy quest'. He will salvation grant  
So precious and so hard to gain, that thou  
Alone on earth girt with the ocean dark,  
Wouldst seem to escape impending ruin great.*

TMP 284-95<sup>72</sup>

These lines are then followed by a long and beautiful description of the hills surrounding the shrine which is replete with the **karus** of the **kuriñci** landscape, and, although the poet of the TMP does not employ the **akattiṇai** conventions explicitly to convey a relationship of love with the deity, in the context of the above passage they appear to symbolise the perfection of love, which Murukan, as the God of that landscape, exemplifies in his very person.

In the Paripāṭal and TMP there is a transition from a generalized awareness of the sacred throughout the natural environment to the localization of the divine in named shrines. By further employing the poetic conventions of **akam**, in particular the attributes of the **kuriñci** landscape, the poets establish the deity in the actual Tamil landscape and, although the associative structure of **akam** is not fully realised, they thereby evoke the ideal of love, which Murukan himself embodies. The hymns of the Nāyanmārs represent the fulfilment of the process towards the concretisation of the divine in specific places and the complete transformation of the **akattiṇai** poetic structure to serve a religious rather than a secular function, the **bhaktas** employing it to

describe and suggest the emotional effects of the mystical encounter with the deity. The Paripāṭal and the TMP display a number of other features which were to be consolidated in **bhakti**, including descriptions of worship and worshippers, which are analogous to depictions in the **bhakti** hymns, and, in the TMP, a work of the indigenous **pulavars**, there is the first explicit statement for the possibility of a relationship of love with the deity and the granting of divine salvation, all of which suggests that the Śaiva **bhakti** tradition may owe a great deal to the cult of Murukan as it had evolved by the 6thC CE. However, although the devotional attitude is more developed in the TMP than in the Paripāṭal, it is still described from an objective rather than a subjective point-of-view, and it is not the personal expression of divine experience that so characterises **bhakti**. These two texts represent the transition between the classical poetry of the Caṅkam age and the emerging poetry of love and devotion to a personal God who, although identified with the Purāṇic tradition of the north, is yet intimately connected with the Tamil land.

## The Caṅkam Literature<sup>1</sup>

### Eṭṭuttokai "Eight Collections"

1. Nar<sub>ri</sub>ṇai - "(The anthology of poems about) the good **tiṇais**"
2. Ku<sub>ru</sub>ntokai - "The anthology of short (poems)"
3. Aiṅku<sub>ru</sub>nū<sub>ru</sub> - "The five hundred short (poems)"
4. Pa<sub>ti</sub>r<sub>ru</sub>ppattu - "The ten tens"
5. Pa<sub>ri</sub>pāṭal - "(The composition in the ) **pa<sub>ri</sub>pāṭal** metre"
6. Ka<sub>li</sub>ttokai - "The anthology in the **ka<sub>li</sub>** metre"
7. Aka<sub>nā</sub>nū<sub>ru</sub> - "The four hundred (stanzas) about **aka<sub>m</sub>**"
8. Pu<sub>ra</sub>nā<sub>nū</sub><sub>ru</sub> - "the four hundred (stanzas) about **pu<sub>ra</sub>m**"

### Pattuppāṭṭu "Ten Songs"

1. Ti<sub>ru</sub>mu<sub>ru</sub>kā<sub>ru</sub>ppaṭai - "The guide to Lord Mu<sub>ru</sub>ka<sub>n</sub>"
2. Po<sub>ru</sub>na<sub>rā</sub><sub>ru</sub>ppaṭai - "The guide for the war-bards"
3. Ci<sub>ru</sub>pa<sub>nā</sub><sub>ru</sub>ppaṭai - "The guide for the bards with the small lute"
4. Pe<sub>ru</sub>mpā<sub>nā</sub><sub>ru</sub>ppaṭai - "The guide for the bards with the large lute"
5. Mu<sub>lla</sub>ippāṭṭu - "The song about the forest (life)"
6. Ma<sub>tura</sub>ikkā<sub>n</sub>ci - "The reflection on Ma<sub>tura</sub>i"
7. Neṭu<sub>na</sub>lvāṭai - "The good long northern wind"
8. Ku<sub>ri</sub>ñci<sub>pā</sub>ṭṭu - "The song about the hills"
9. Paṭṭi<sub>na</sub>ppā<sub>la</sub>i - "(The poem about) separation and the city"
10. Ma<sub>la</sub>ipaṭu<sub>kā</sub>ta<sub>m</sub> - "(The poem of the sound) **kā<sub>ta</sub>m** pertaining to the mountains"

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Zvelebil, 1973, p.29.



Dates and Abbreviations for the Caṅkam Literature<sup>2</sup>

Earliest strata in the Anthologies:

Aiṅkurunūru	(Aiṅk.)	
Kuruntokai	(Kurun.)	1st century BCE -
Narrinai	(Nar_r.)	2nd century CE
Puranānūru	(Puran.)	
Akanānūru	(Akan.)	

Earliest songs in the **Pattupāṭṭu**:

Porunarār_ruppaṭai	(Poru.)	
Perumpāṇār_ruppaṭai	(Perump.)	2nd century -
Paṭṭinappālai	(Paṭṭ.)	3rd century CE
Kuṛiṅcippāṭṭu	(Kuṛi.)	

Middle strata in the Anthologies given above and Patir\_ruppattu (Pat.)

Also new songs:

Malaipaṭukātam	(Mal.)	2nd - 4th
Maturaikkāñci	(Mat.)	century CE
Neṭunalvāṭai	(Net.)	

Later strata in Pu\_r., Akan., Pat.

Also new songs:

Mullaippāṭṭu	(Mul.)	3rd - 5th
Cirupanār_ruppaṭai	(Cirup.)	century CE

Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram: 5th century CE

Paripāṭal (Pari.) and Kalittokai (Kali.): 5th-7thC CE

Tirumurukā\_ruppaṭai (TMP): 550-600 CE

Cilappatikāram (Cila.): 5th-6thC CE

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<sup>2</sup> This chart is based on the dates given by Zvelebil, 1973, pp.42-43, p.124, and p.130. See also Hardy, 1983, p.125.

1. Zvelebil, 1973, p.4.
2. Ibid. p.40.
3. K.Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, Oxford 1968, p.184.
4. Dating for the Caṅkam texts as a whole will generally be based upon the dates given by Zvelebil, 1973. See in particular pp.21-43, and also p.61 on Maturaikkāñci, pp.145-47 on Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram, pp.175,179 on Cilappatikāram, p.120 on Kalittokai, p.124 on Paripāṭal, and p.130 on Tirumurukārruppaṭai. These dates are accepted by Hardy, 1983, pp.124-126, with the exception of the TMP -for a discussion on the dates of this text see p.39.
5. Zvelebil ibid. p.28.
6. Ibid. p.25.
7. Ibid. p.29. The poetry may have been codified as a result of the threat posed to the indigenous tradition by the **Kaḷabhra** period and its close association with Buddhism and Jainism.
8. Ibid. pp.25-26.
9. The literature came to be known as the Caṅkam corpus on the basis of a legend which is first mentioned in the commentary of a theoretical work on the **akam** conventions, *Iraiyanār's Akapporuḷ* of the 4th-6thC CE (Zvelebil 1973 p.87). The commentator, Nakkīrar, ca650-750 CE, gives details of three academies or **caṅkam** of poets which are said to have flourished in ancient Tamiḷnāṭu: the first is said to have lasted 4400 years and gathered under the presidency of Śiva in the ancient capital of Maturai, long disappeared; the second lasted 3700 years and was presided over by Agastya at Kapāṭapuram, which was eventually submerged in the sea; the third and final **caṅkam** gathered in modern Maturai and lasted 1850 years, and consisted of 49 kings and 449 poets, presided over by Nakkīrar (see Zvelebil ibid. p.46, and Kailasapathy, 1968, p.2).
10. **Pulavan** is the standard word for a poet in modern Tamil and the only designation to have survived.
11. Kailasapathy, 1968, p.113.
12. Ibid. p.112.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. p.113.
15. Ibid. p.121.

16. There are two other treatises which deal with the conventions of the bardic literature: Aiyānār Itanār's *Purapporuḷ venpā mālai* "The garland of *venpā* (stanzas) on the subject of heroism" which deals with the *puram* genre, and, although the date is uncertain it is probably later than the *Poruḷatikāram* (Zvelebil 1973, p.90); and another theoretical work, *Iraiyānār's Akapporuḷ*, (see above n.9) which probably represents the earliest work on the poetic conventions of *akam*, in two parts on *kaḷavu* (pre-marital or clandestine love), and *karpu* (conjugal love).

17. Zvelebil, 1973, p.40.

18. See Kailasapathy, 1968, p.123. For example, the Jain classification of lives into *jīva* and *ajīva* is dealt with in a chapter on tradition and literary usage.

19. In the initial stages of their relationship the lovers were able to meet alone together, although secretly, and establish their relationship, but marriage was deemed essential to the proper fulfillment of their actions.

20. According to the *Tolkāppiyam* there are seven kinds of love, the first of which is *kaikkilai*, or unrequited love, and the last *peruntinai*, or mismatched love, although neither of these categories are considered the proper subject for *akam* poetry and they may represent the influence of more "popular" poetry upon the classical literary tradition. These categories are not dealt with by the early literature but first appear in the *Kalittokai*, a late classical text. See Zvelebil, 1973, pp.91-93.

21. A.K.Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1967, p.108.

22. For a more complete picture of the symbolic conventions functioning within *akam* see Ramanujan, *ibid.* p.107, and Zvelebil, 1973, p.100.

23. Ramanujan, *ibid.* p.108.

24. See Zvelebil, 1973, pp.103-108.

25. Translation by Ramanujan, 1967, quoted in Zvelebil, *ibid.* p.73.

26. K.K.Young "Beloved Places(*Ukantarulīnanilāṅkal*): The Correlation of Topography and Theology in the Śrīvaiṣṇava Tradition of South India", Thesis for DrP, McGill University Montreal 1978, p.48. Although she is referring to the *Ālvārs* the assimilation of the various *urīs* into shrines associated with Śiva also applies to the *Nāyanmārs*.

27. Trans. by Petersen, 1989, p.166. Here, and subsequently the numbering of the hymns quoted is that given by the translator of the hymn. Petersen follows the *Kaḷakam* edition of the *Tēvāram* (South India Śaiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society) which gives continuous numbering of the hymns whilst indicating which book of the *Tēvāram* it comes from (in Roman numerals) - see Petersen, p.87.

28. For an in depth study on the conventions and formulae of this bardic tradition see Kailasapathy, 1968, especially p.138f; see also Petersen, 1989, Chapter 3, pp.33-36 on **puram** features in **bhakti**.

29. See Petersen, *ibid.* p.34. This is only one aspect of the relationship between the deity and devotees, however. The erotic dimension of the relationship has already been discussed but the **bhaktas** also address Śiva as his comrades and companions (**tōlar**), and as children to a parent.

30. *Ibid.* p.311.

31. For example, according to Zvelebil the classical literature "*makes almost no allusions to super-natural meddling in wordly affairs*" ( 1973, p.20).

32. See Kailasapathy, 1968, p.261.

33. Zvelebil, 1973, p.19.

34. *Ibid.* p.19.

35. Kailasapathy, 1968, p.234.

36. *Ibid.* p.254.

37. *Ibid.* p.255.

38. See Zvelebil "The Beginnings of Bhakti in South India" *Temenos* 13, 1977, pp.223-57.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Hardy, 1983, p.131.

41. F.Clothey, 1978, p.12 and p.205, n.4.

42. *Ibid.* p.205, n.5. See also p.12.

43. V.S.Rajam "Aṇaṅku: A Notion Semantically Reduced to Signify Female Sacred Power" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986), pp.257-272, p.260.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.* p.270.

46. *Ibid.* p.271.

47. *Ibid.* p.266.

48. Hardy, 1983, p.133.



49. Ibid. p.136.

50. In the earliest Caṅkam texts **vallī** occurs frequently as a type of creeping plant with edible tubers, a plant of the **kuriñci tinaṭi** - eg. Akan. 52:1, 286:2, Purāṇ. 316:9, Narṛ. 269:7, 295:1. There are few references to Valli as a person in any texts before the 6th century, although Narṛ. 82:4, ascribed to Maturai Aḷakkar Nālār Maṇṇār Maḷḷaṇār, has been dated by Zvelebil to the 2-3rd CCE. The passage is as follows: "*Oh you, girl of the mountain tribe whose gait is beautiful, will you come to me like Valli who had gladly agreed to go to join Muruku*". See Zvelebil "Valli and Murugan - A Dravidian Myth" *Indo-Iranian Journal* 19, 1977, pp.227-246, p.233.

51. Hardy, 1983, p.136.

52. Ibid. pp.146-147.

53. Kailasapathy, 1968, p.243.

54. Clothey, 1978, p.35. For his ideas on the development of Murukan as a God of war see in particular pp.25-35.

55. Ibid. p.35.

56. Hardy, 1983, p.235.

57. Petersen, 1989, p.168.

58. See Zvelebil, 1973, p.124, and Hardy, 1983, p.126, note 27.

59. They are Paripāṭal 5, 8, 9, 14, 17, 18, 19 and 21.

60. See Hardy, 1983, pp.214 -217.

61. Ibid. p.216.

62. See Petersen, 1989, p.98 - the term **aṭiyār** (above p.28) derives from **aṭi** or "foot".

63. Tiru. 6:44 - from Yocum, 1982, p.173.

64. Cam.I.52.3. - from Petersen, 1989, pp.128-29.

65. Zvelebil, 1973, p.130.

66. Ibid. p.27, n.1.

67. Ibid. p.27 and n.1, and pp.45-46.

68. J.V.Chelliah, *Pattupāṭṭu - Ten Tamil Idylls*, introduction, trans. and notes by Chelliah, the Indian Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 2nd ed., Madras 1962, p.343.

69. Petersen, 1989, p.187.

70. Chelliah, 1962, p.345.

71. Clothey, 1978, p.230, n.16. His suggestion is that the Lātaṅkōvil temple at the foot of Aṇṇamālai to the north-east of Maturai, which dates to the late 8th century, may be the original Paraṅkunram.

72. Chelliah, 1962, p.359. See also Yocum "Shrines, Shamanism and Love Poetry: Elements in the Emergence of Popular Tamil Bhakti" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, 1973, pp.3-17, p.17.

Evidence for the Origins of the Śaiva **Bhakti** Shrines

One of the major distinguishing features of the **bhakti** hymns is the importance of sacred places in the **bhaktas'** experience of the divine. The hymns display a shrine-oriented character, in particular those of the Tēvāram poets, mentioning a total of 274 separate shrines<sup>1</sup>, the majority of which are located in Tamiḷnāṭu, with the main concentration in the Kāverī River Delta Region. The shrines are the Beloved (**ukanta**, **mēviya**, **nayanta**) Abodes (**iṭam**) of the Lord, the places where the devotees experience the deity and achieve liberation from the bonds of **saṃsāra** through the bestowal of Śiva's grace. In their hymns the **bhaktas** exalt Śiva by celebrating the natural environment, revealing a positive attitude to the world, in which the earth itself becomes the realm of spiritual release. Each hymn is intimately connected with a specific shrine, and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, by making use of the associative structure of **akam**, drawing metaphors from the natural world, and employing the poetic techniques of **uvamai** and **iraicci** with religious intent, they imbue many of their depictions of the natural landscape with profound religious meaning, the conventional formulae of the earlier literature also serving to locate the deity in specific places in the Tamil countryside, thereby identifying the **bhakti** experience of God with the Tamil region itself.

It has been suggested by Ramanujan that the **bhakti** poets "*literally sang places into existence*"<sup>2</sup>, creating shrines for the deity



where none had previously existed. Indeed, there is little evidence for temple worship in the earlier cultural period, with only a handful of references to named temples throughout the classical literature. However, there is evidence which indicates that, although the early Tamils did not necessarily worship within the confines of a structural temple, they did venerate a number of places considered to be the dwelling place of a god or spirit, and that worship was offered at these shrines at least by the time of the classical texts, if not for many centuries before. The rise of the **bhakti** movement also coincided with the construction of the first rock-cut and stone-built temples in Southern India, under the aegis of the Pallava and, to a lesser extent, Pāṇṭiya dynasties, from ca.600 CE. Both these kingdoms are traditionally closely associated with the **bhakti** movement: for example, there is the tradition of Appar's conversion to Śaivism of Mahendravarman Pallava I, and Campantar is said to have likewise converted Arikēcari Pārāṅkuca Māṇavarman, the King of Maturai, whilst Māṇikkavācakar was prime minister at the Pāṇṭiyan court prior to his religious calling. This relationship would appear to suggest some degree of interdependence between the architectural innovations of these kingdoms and the shrine-oriented character of **bhakti**, and that the proliferation of permanent temples in the south may have resulted from an alliance between the interests of sovereignty and those of the **bhakti** movement itself.

On the basis of literary, architectural and inscriptional data for the existence of shrines, both prior to and contemporary with the rise of the **bhakti** movement, further illuminated by evidence for present day village worship, this chapter will attempt to discover whether the numerous shrines of the **bhakti** hymns can be accounted for by the continuation of the earlier, indigenous cultural tradition, the role of sovereignty and the architectural innovations of the Pallavas and Pāṇṭiyas, or if it can, indeed, be said that the Nāyanmārs sang the



shrines into existence.

### *Evidence for Temples in the Caṅkam Literature*

There is scant evidence in the Caṅkam literature for the temple as a separate and religiously significant building. The terms which came to denote a temple in later Tamil language, **kōyil** and **nakar**, did not have any religious import in the earliest texts. **Kōyil**, from the root **kō** "tribesman, leader or chieftain", later a term for god, originally meant "house of the chief" or "palace", and **nakar**, from the Sanskrit **nagara**, originally meant "town"<sup>3</sup>. According to K.R.Srinivasan<sup>4</sup> the term **kōyil** is used in the sense of a temple only once, in the epic Cilappatikāram, and on three inscriptions, prior to the 10th century CE, and the meaning "temple" seems to have been read back into these terms by the Caṅkam commentators, lending them a significance which they did not originally have. However, Hardy has analysed two further terms, **potiyil** and **kantu**, which he believes point to an earlier, indigenous form of Tamil temple<sup>5</sup>:

*"...the public hall (potiyil) with the pillar (kantu), where wayfarers (used to) rest, and where captive girls, after plunging into the fresh-water tank, would kindle the "perpetual" lamp at twilight, and where many (people) would cross over the ground prepared with cowdung, and beautified with flowers would worship."*

Paṭṭ.246-49<sup>6</sup>

Hardy suggests that the **potiyil** or "public hall", depicted in the above passage as both a resting place for travellers and a place of ritualistic worship, could be the prototype of the later Tamil temple. The **kantu** or "pillar", which also has the meaning of a "*post for cows to rub up against*"<sup>7</sup>, here takes on a definite religious significance, further underlined by a passage in the Akanānūru which explicitly relates it to the presence of the divine:

*"in the pillar (kantu) with a black foot, where the god has entered, in the public hall (potiyil)..."*  
Akan.307<sup>8</sup>

According to Fred Clothey, on the evidence of Akanānūru 167:14-16 and 309:4-6 (unquoted)<sup>9</sup>, at some time during the early Caṅkam period the **kantu** "came to be used as a representation of the god (Murukan). It was usually set up under a **kaṭampu** tree. The **kantu** was apparently set on a pedestal over a dais and over it, a crude roof was supported by wooden pillars and crossbar. The ground around the **kantu** was soaked with blood"<sup>10</sup>. Clothey further suggests that the **kōṭṭam**, the sacred place where the **vēlan** (indigenous priest) became possessed by Murukan (see below Chp.4), eventually became a covered enclosure which "may have been a forerunner to the Tamil temple"<sup>11</sup>.

Excluding the late epic Cilappatikāram, the Caṅkam sources mention only nine temples by name and, of these, the majority occur in texts which post-date the 6th century CE, although, as Hardy has argued, this lack of references does not mean the temples were all built after the 6th centry, but, rather, that it was not a feature of the early Caṅkam bardic tradition to move from temple to temple, or bestow them with great importance<sup>12</sup>. They are: Tiruveḥkā in Kāñcī (Perump.[2nd-3rd centuries CE]), Tirumāliruñcōlai near Maturai (Pari.), Iruntaiyūr in Maturai (Pari.), all associated with Viṣṇu; Tiruparaṅkunram (Mat.270-73, Akan.59, Pari.5, 8, 9, 14, TMP I), Centil (Puṛan.55, 147, TMP II), Tiruāvinakuṭi (TMP III), Tiruvērakam (TMP IV), and Paḷamutircōlai (TMP VI), associated with Murukan; and there is one reference to a hill abode of Śiva (Malaipaṭukaṭām 109).

Because of the close identification by the **bhakti** tradition between Murukan and Skanda, and, by implication, Śiva, the shrines which are associated with Murukan require further elucidation. In

order to clarify their identity this will also require reference to architectural and inscriptional evidence, where it is available, and to any other characteristics peculiar to a particular shrine<sup>13</sup>.

The most frequent literary references are to Tiruparaṅkuṇram, a sacred site situated on a hill, five miles to the south-west of Maturai - Paraṅkuṇram means literally "the exalted hill". As we have seen, Tiruparaṅkuṇram is the setting for a number of poems in the Paripāṭal, and Chapter 1 of the Tirumurukāruppāṭai is dedicated to this shrine, both these texts displaying a shrine-oriented character unknown to the earlier literature. An important feature in these texts is the description of the beauty of the landscape surrounding the shrine, which incorporates many of the features of the akattiṇai structure of akam, in particular the uri of erotic union associated with Murukaṇ himself. Paraṅkuṇram is also mentioned in a late portion of Akanānūru (59), a poem which, according to Hardy, post-dates the Paripāṭal<sup>14</sup>, and which describes the shrine as "*cool Paraṅkuṇram of Murukaṇ*", a "*mountain rich in sandal*"<sup>15</sup>. However, although it is only in these late classical texts that Paraṅkuṇram attains prominence in the literature, there is a reference to the shrine in Maturaikāñci, a text which has been dated by Zvelebil to between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE<sup>16</sup>:

*"...the joyful sound  
Of those who celebrate the festival  
Held on the sacred mount (Tiruparaṅkuṇram) where fall  
Refreshing rains with gentle sound"*  
Mat.270-73<sup>17</sup>

This poem also describes the splendour of the natural environment surrounding the shrine, and the reference to a festival in the above passage further suggests that religious celebration must have been a well-established practice at the shrine in the early classical period. Although the earliest existing temple at the site dates to the 8th century CE (see below p.74), there is evidence that it was

regarded as an ancient sacred place, its history attested to by an inscription dating to the 2nd century CE which refers to a Ceylonese householder (Īla Kuṭumbikaṇ) who gave a grant to a cave resort on the hill<sup>18</sup>.

The second chapter of the TMP is dedicated to Centil, or Tiruccīralaivāy, and it is also mentioned in the later strata of the Puraṇānūru (3rd-5th centuries CE)<sup>19</sup>, where its natural beauty is described in reference to the Pāṇṭiyan King Māraṇ:

*"May you (King Māraṇ) live as long as the sand-dunes  
piled up by the breeze at the fair port belonging to the  
great Murukaṇ, Centil, where the waves beat."*

Puraṇ.55<sup>20</sup>

Centil has been identified with modern Tiruchendur, a seashore shrine on the Bay of Bengal in Tirunelveli District, and, although the earliest inscription ascribed to this shrine dates to 875 CE<sup>21</sup>, it is noteworthy that there is a cave, known as the Vaḷḷi cave, situated close to the present temple in a bank overlooking the sea<sup>22</sup>, which may represent a more ancient shrine.

All other literary references to Murukaṇ shrines are contained in the TMP. Chapter 3 is dedicated to Tiruāvinakuṭi, which has been identified with the temple at the foot of the central hill at Paḷani, a town on the edge of the Paḷni hill range near the western edge of Tamiḷnāṭu. A local tradition attached to this shrine suggests that it was built by the early Cēras of the Caṅkam period, and this is supported by two sculptures of a king on horseback at the entrance to the main shrine and a subsidiary shrine, said to represent the ancient Cēra monarch Vinayaka, although no inscriptions date prior to the 13th century CE<sup>23</sup>. Paḷani actually encompasses a complex of some thirty-two temples, and is an important pilgrimage centre for Murukaṇ devotees today, its sacrality apparently drawn from its position in the surrounding environment, with two hills adjoining the town, preceding



the main range of the Paḷni hills, and, two miles to the west of the town, the site of the confluence of six tributary streams which merge with the main Ṣaṇmukha river<sup>24</sup>.

Chapter 4 refers to Tiruvērakam, which has been identified with the Swamimalai Temple in Tanjore. Although the elevation is not great, this temple is again located on a hill, situated by the Kāverī river. It is not far from Uṛaiyūr, the ancient capital of the Cōḷas, and close to Kumbakōṇam, one of the most famous **bhakti** shrines. However, there is no architectural evidence from the temple itself which dates to the period of the TMP.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to Kuṇrutōṛāṭal, literally "dancing on the hills", and, although many temples have claimed ancient sanctity by associating themselves with it, this chapter has not been identified with any specific temple and it is generally thought, as its name implies, to represent every hill sacred to Murukaṇ rather than any particular shrine.

Finally Paḷamutircōlai, literally "a grove of ripe fruit", has been identified with Tiruttaṇi, a temple situated in the hills on the northern border of Tamiḷnāṭu, seventy miles north-west of Madras. However, the sixth chapter of the TMP gives a very broad description of Murukaṇ's domain<sup>25</sup>, including references to trees, crossroads, the **potiyil** and the **kantu**, which are described as the abodes of the deity, and the identification with Tiruttaṇi appears to be rather tenuous. Indeed, although the sacred sites of Murukaṇ are traditionally held to be six, Clothey<sup>26</sup> has suggested that this is a late accretion indicative of the symbolism associated with Skanda rather than the actual situation of the classical period.

The single reference to an abode of Śiva is in the Malaipaṭukaṭām, a text dated by Zvelebil to between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE<sup>27</sup>. It is dedicated to the chieftain Nannaṇ who is compared to the God:

*"By nature he (Nannan) is like the god whose food  
Is poison, he who lives in Naviram hill,  
Who makes the sea-girt earth to tremble much,  
Inspires great fear and with his famous strength  
Doth put to flight its foes..."*

Mal.108-112<sup>28</sup>

As the evidence of the Caṅkam literature indicates, the origins of the actual temple building in southern India cannot be identified with any degree of certainty. It may have its roots in the **potiyil**, a public building apparently used for both secular and religious purposes, and the passage quoted from the Paṭṭinapālai further suggests that a very institutionalized form of worship existed in the Caṅkam period, although, in the absence of any further information, it is difficult to assess just how significant a role the **potiyil** played in the religious life of the early Tamils. On the other hand, the temple building may stem from the enclosure of a sacred spot closely connected with the worship of Murukan, and the texts further indicate that a major focus of worship was the **kantu**, a pillar which symbolised the divine, and to which worship was directed in the form of offerings such as flowers, and even blood. It is only in the transitional literature, where the religious element is more pronounced, that the naming of temples becomes a significant feature, the attention of the poets having shifted from praise of human patrons to the divine, although the inscriptional and architectural evidence for these temples is so limited that it is impossible to know what form they originally took. It is possible that some of the shrines, such as those at Paraṅkunram and Centil, originated as natural caves, but a striking feature of all the Murukan shrines, as well as the single reference to an abode of Śiva, is their close association with features of the natural environment. Rather than any physical construction, the main criterion for the existence of a shrine appears to have been the symbolic significance of the surrounding landscape, the deity not

necessarily required <sup>ing</sup> to be confined within a structural temple. ing/

### *The Nature of Shrines in the Early Classical Period*

Despite the general lack of evidence for concrete temples and the limited nature of the religious element in the early Caṅkam texts, there is an awareness of the divine, and a tendency to associate sacredness with a natural source, such as a tree, a stone, a hill or mountain peak, and a body of water. These sacred symbols are found in cultures throughout the world, and, as universal emblems, they represent the immense source of power and fertility hidden within the earth, the tree and the mountain peak further symbolising the *axis mundi*, the point of communication between the two realms of man and God which passes through the centre of the universe. Even today every important South Indian temple is closely associated with a tree or trees, and a source of water in some form, such as a river, a tank or the sea, which represent the shrine as the very centre of creation from which the universe has emerged<sup>29</sup>.

The tree is particularly important in the Caṅkam literature as a symbol of sacred power. Trees are frequently described as the habitat or embodiment of various deities in the Caṅkam texts: "*the god (kaṭavuḷ) of the pipal tree in the courtyard terrifies and strikes down the wicked*" (Kur<sub>u</sub>n.87)<sup>30</sup>; "...*the forest exalted (because of) the god in the marā tree of fine stem...*" (Mal.394-96)<sup>31</sup>; "*the god in the banyan tree*" (Pu<sub>r</sub>an.198-99)<sup>32</sup>; and, in the slightly later Kalittokai, Murukaṇ is described as "*the son of the Lord who resides under the banyan tree*" (Kali.83:14)<sup>33</sup>. In the early literature Murukaṇ is most frequently associated with the kaṭampu tree (see above Chp 2, pp.33-34), and, in the more religiously inspired Paripāṭal, this association becomes particularly pronounced. Murukaṇ is said either to reside beneath the kaṭampu or wear its red blossoms as a garland. For example:

*"O Mount of Paraṅkunram! Although the rain fails and makes the whole world suffer you will always have your perennial mountain-streams, where the lovers, as well as the devotees, worship the lord who resides under the kaṭampu tree."*

Pari.8 127-30<sup>34</sup>

Trees are also found in the centre of, or surrounding, the **kaḷam** or "threshing-ground", one of the sacred places where the **vēlan** invokes Murukan:

*"The broad kaḷam where offerings are found under the lofty branches of the marutu tree in which snakes live..."*

Perump.232f<sup>35</sup>

There are a number of other allusions in the texts which indicate that the tree was considered to have a sacred nature. For example, in **Puraṇānūru** 41 it is taken as a bad omen when a large tree begins to wither and drop its leaves<sup>36</sup>, and in **Akaṇānūru** 256 the **maṇḍram** tree is used as an oracle to judge the guilt or innocence of a man accused of molesting a young girl - his guilt is proven when the branch over his head bursts into flames and sheds ashes on his head<sup>37</sup>.

There are also several references in the early literature to tutelary trees, **kaṭimaram** or **kāvalmaram**, literally "guarded tree". These trees represented the sovereignty of a king or chieftain who, victorious in battle, would cut down his enemy's tutelary tree (eg. **Akan.**46, **Puraṇ.**23,57, **Kuṛun.**73), sometimes using the wood to make a war drum (**Puraṇ.**288)<sup>38</sup>. No single species of tree was adopted as the tutelary tree - in **Kuṛuntokai** 45 the tree of King Titiyan is a **punnai** and in **Kuṛun.**73 the enemies of king **Nannan** enter his country after cutting down his mango tree<sup>39</sup>. Hart has suggested that the tutelary tree symbolised the sacred power inherent in the body of the king and that the effect of cutting down the tree was "to break the king's connection with the sacred"<sup>40</sup>, thereby unleashing chaos



throughout his territory. However, the sacred character of the tutelary tree is not explicit in the early texts, and it is not until the late Caṅkam period that the religious significance of this tree becomes apparent when it is directly associated with Murukan̄ - for example, in Paripāṭal 17(1-4) in praise of Cevvēḷ, the devotees at Paraṅkunram are described worshipping the guardian tree, the kaṭimaram of kaṭampu, to the trunk of which the vēlan̄ has attached a ram, apparently as a sacrificial offering<sup>41</sup>. There are also several references, in both the Paripāṭal and the TMP, to the myth of Murukan̄'s defeat of the demon Cūr, who appeared in battle in the form of a mango tree and was cut in two by the God, who transformed the two still-living parts into a cock and a peacock, his banner and vehicle<sup>42</sup>:

*"The god with the red spear, whose praise is immeasurable and victory faultless, subjugated the avuṇar by cutting down the mango tree with boughs bowing down with the weight of flower, and destroyed Cūr who was half man and half horse."*

TMP 58-61<sup>43</sup>

Stones were also considered sacred emblems by the early Tamils, in particular the monument stones (naṭukal -literally "planted stones"), which were erected to heroes who died in battle in order to honour and immortalise them:

*"...stones erected with the name of unending good fame of warriors who have given rise to an excellent lineage..."*

Mal.387-9<sup>44</sup>

*"There are rows of hero-stones in memory of the glorious self-respecting warriors, who died in a fierce battle-ground shot through with crowded arrows"*

Akan.387:15-19<sup>45</sup>

The undoubted religious significance of these stones is attested to by references in the classical literature which associate them with

trees and forests already sanctified by the presence of a deity. For example:

*"...the forest exalted (because of) the god in the marā tree of fine stem, in which the names (of heroes) - for people to know - had been written in stones that had been 'sculptured'..."*

Mal.394-6<sup>46</sup>

The "sculpting" of the stones in memory of the dead heroes, referred to in the above passage, is also related in Akanānūru (53:11; 67:9), and is frequently alluded to in the Tolkāppiyam. The word that is employed in these contexts is *eḷutu*, "to draw, write or paint", but, as Kalisapathy has argued<sup>47</sup>, this does not necessarily imply that a detailed epitaph was inscribed, but, rather, that some form of representation of the dead warrior was etched into the stone, which may have included the depiction of a cattle-raid, a frequent cause of a warrior's death:

*"Prominent hero-stones erected on the wayside are decorated with peacock feathers; on them are inscribed the name and might of the fallen warriors. These sharp shooters, imbued with honour, fought furiously with their well filed arrows of fine edge to recover their kine."*

Akan.67:5-10<sup>48</sup>

The setting up of a *naṭukal* occurs as a poetical theme in the Tolkāppiyam, but this text also contains information regarding the ceremony involved in the process, which indicates that it entailed some form of religious ritual. The ceremony consisted of six separate stages, and the description makes it clear that the stones were considered to be shrines to the dead warriors. According to the Tolkāppiyam the stages involved were: the search for a stone; the fixing of an auspicious time; the ceremonial bathing of the stone; the setting up of the stone; celebration and feasting; and, finally, praise and worship<sup>49</sup>.

The monument stones recall a more ancient practice of the

Megalithic culture of South India, associated with the period of the southern Iron Age (from ca 1300-500 BCE). The principal source of information for this period derives from a vast complex of graves<sup>50</sup> distributed throughout the Peninsular region from Trichur District in south-western Kerala to the central Deccan, with a heavy concentration in Tamiḷnāṭu, particularly on the eastern coastal plain below Madras. The majority of these graves, which are located in graveyards sometimes a long distance from any identifiable habitation site, suggesting that they may represent the sites of battles, are marked by stones, occasionally megaliths. At Amaravati near Madras, for instance, stone-circles surround three central standing stones, and, in the central Deccan, an unusual phenomenon occurs in association with the burial sites where alignments of standing stones, some ~~up to~~<sup>#</sup> six metres in height, are found laid out in square or diagonal patterns. These are usually of nine to twenty-five stones, although alignments of several hundred stones occur, oriented on the cardinal points. Some of these megaliths, as well as a number of the stones found scattered throughout Tamiḷnāṭu, have representations of cattle-raids on them, or deep grooves cut into them, including circles and other geometric designs, recalling the "sculpted" stones attested to by the classical literature.

The status of the shrine in the early period may also be reflected in contemporary Indian village worship, which represents the continuation of an ancient, pre-Brahmanical, ideology at a "folk" level. Every Indian village has its own tutelary deity (*grāmadevatā*), usually a goddess, although it is occasionally a god. The village deities tend to be capricious and passionate in character and are held to be directly responsible for death and disease in the village, requiring regular propitiation, usually in the form of offerings, including sacrifice. Their effects are purely local, confined within the

village boundary but applicable to the whole community, although there are various other village spirits which are exclusive to different caste groups. Village shrines are rarely large and the deity is not usually represented anthropomorphically but by uncarved stones, bricks and trees. Different types of village shrines include a platform or a stone installed under a tree, a stone or brick with a trident in front of it, an enclosure in which a spear is stuck in the ground, and a sacred grove. In the Madras area, the goddess Mariyatta is represented by three bricks, reminiscent of the three central stones of the Megalithic graves in this region<sup>51</sup>, and, in the same area, the guardian deity of villages is frequently a male, Aiyandar, his shrine usually located outside the village in a sacred grove of trees<sup>52</sup>.

Evidence for the sacred nature of both trees and stones, therefore, is found throughout the early Caṅkam literature, and is further attested to by contemporary practices in Indian villages. The archaeological evidence for stones suggests that their religious significance is very ancient indeed, although, whilst the sacred nature of the tree becomes more pronounced in the transitional texts, the Paripāṭal and the TMP of the late Caṅkam period, literary references to hero-stones diminish. This may indicate that this sacred symbol was so closely connected with the heroes of the early period, that, with the general decline of the bardic groups who related their heroic exploits, from ca.5th century CE, there was a simultaneous decline in literary allusions, although the stones continued to have significance at a popular level. However, both symbols illustrate the localised conception of the supernatural, the divine dwelling in natural phenomena, and they further recall the *kantu* pillar, which may itself derive from the earlier worship of trees or stones. According to Venkata Ramanayya "...the gods of South India had no temples at the beginning. Almost all of them were worshipped in the form of



trees"<sup>53</sup>. To this we may add stones, and it is possible that the tree and the stone are representative of the original shrines of the Tamils and the basis of at least some of the **bhakti** shrines.

### *The Role of Sovereignty*

The reign of the Guptas, during which Purāṇic religion was established in the north, is associated with a change in attitude to kingship which was to have a profound effect upon the south and which, in many ways, accelerated the Āryanising process and assisted the political expansion of the dynasties which came to power there in the 6th century. The notion of kingship changed, from one of sacrificial kingship, whereby the king was constituted in the sacrificial arena, to a "*larger conception of the ritual domain of kingship in which the king was seen as descended from one of the two great gods of the purāṇic traditions, Viṣṇu and Śiva*"<sup>54</sup>. Within this ritual framework the king's function was not conceived of in terms of legislation but of protection and, as a protector of Purāṇic religion, he bestowed large grants of land and money upon Brahman settlements (**brahmadēyas**), an institution which served to assure the Brahman position in territory which had not previously been dominated by Āryan ideology, and for the construction and maintenance of temples. Whereas gift-giving had previously been only one element in the basic definition of the king as sacrificer, in the form of ritual dues (**dakṣiṇā**) to Brahman priests, it became of paramount importance as a constituent of sovereignty. Temple-endowment was a major form of gift-giving and, as one of the main dharmic duties of the king, was a necessary requirement for the peace and prosperity of the whole kingdom. It also became a major technique for the peaceful expansion of royal control into new areas, articulating publically the generosity of the king and his moral duty to the order of society and the well-being of his subjects.

### *The Pallavas*

The sudden proliferation of rock-cut and stone-built temples in southern India from ca600 CE associated with this change in attitude to kingship began during the reign of Mahendravarman Pallava I (570-630CE)<sup>55</sup>, although the Pallava dynasty are known to have been established in the north of Tamiḷnāṭu, in an area known as Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, centred around the city of Kāñcī, since 350CE<sup>56</sup>, and in the Āndhra country since the 2nd century CE<sup>57</sup>. They did not expand their territory southwards until the reign of Siṃhaviṣṇu (535-570CE) who is said to have conquered the Cōḷa country as far south as the Kāveri<sup>58</sup>, and, under the rule of Mahendravarman, they extended their control northwards as far as the Kṛṣṇa river. However, his reign is most noteworthy for the construction of the first rock-cut temples in the Tamil country, and the establishment of a particularly southern style of architecture - his architectural innovations led to him being known as Vichitra-chitta or the "curious or inventive minded".

Ten complete rock-cut cave temples and the remains of a number of brick-and-mortar (*mūla-sthāna*) temples have been identified with his reign<sup>59</sup>, the majority of which are dedicated to Śiva, but also to Viṣṇu, and a number are Jain, such as the cave temple at Śitaṇṇavāśal, which is in keeping with the tradition that he professed the Jain religion prior to his conversion to Śaivism by Appar. The rock-cut temples consist of simple pillared halls with one or more small sanctuaries cut into the back wall, each of the short and massive pillars having a plain shaft with curved brackets, indicative of the difficulties of working in the hard rock of the area which was either granite or gneiss, and further embellished with plaster to which painting or stucco was applied. The fact that the use of stone was unusual in the south at the time is suggested by an inscription of this period on the Maṇḍagappaṭṭu rock-cut temple in South Arcot District which states that Mahendravarman built it without the use of bricks,

timber, metal or mortar, the clear implication being that these were the more usual fabrics used in temple-construction. The temples dedicated to Śiva include Lalitāñ Kura's cave, or the upper cave temple at Tiruchirāppaḷḷi, located by the Kāverī river where the majority of the **bhakti** shrines are to be found. There is a relief showing Śiva as Gaṅgādhara, although an accompanying inscription compares Śiva as the bearer of the Gaṅgā to Mahendra as lover of the Kāverī, and this relief is thought to represent both the deity and the king. According to Huntington "*sometimes images in Pallava art were apparently meant to have a double meaning, being both a representation of the god and an allusion to the king, as is the case of the Gaṅgādhara image in the cave at Tiruchirāppaḷḷi*"<sup>60</sup>. Despite its location on the Kāverī, neither this temple, nor any of the other rock-cut temples of Mahendra's reign, are mentioned by the Nāyaṇmārs as **bhakti** shrines, and, rather than representing a construction in support of a "new" religious movement, the main theme would appear to be the identification of the presiding deity with the king, the artistic expression of the relationship of direct descent between the god and the monarch associated with the Purāṇic model of kingship.

The reign of Narasimhavarman I (630-668), the son of Mahendravarman, saw a long period of peace and prosperity during which the development of southern architecture proceeded at a rapid rate. Narasimhavarman is associated in particular with Māmallapuram (modern Mahabalipuram) at the mouth of the Palar river, 32 miles south of Madras. The site covers several square miles and most of the monuments of his reign are rock-cut rather than stone-built, carved out of outcropping hillocks of granite into caves, monoliths and sculpted reliefs. Some of these monuments show stylistic innovations with, for example, column shafts more elaborately fashioned into heraldic lions. More importantly, however, they also exhibit features which suggest the existence of earlier examples, displaying not only



a debt to Buddhist architecture, but the influence of wood construction, "*with all the details of timber work faithfully reproduced in granite*"<sup>61</sup>. These influences are clearly visible on the five southern Rathas, carved rocks each of which is different, and yet each of which carries the heritage of earlier structures made of impermanent materials: the Draupadī Ratha to the north is the smallest and is a reproduction in stone of a square, wooden thatched hut dedicated to a form of Durgā<sup>62</sup>, which is reminiscent of the thatched temple-hut suggested by Clothey as a forebear of the permanent Tamil temple (see above p.54); the Arjuna Ratha is slightly more complex and has a pyramidal roof composed of three tiers of small pavilions crowned with a cupola, in apparent imitation of a Buddhist **vihāra**, and, although it is traditionally associated with Indra, it is more likely that Murukan was the original deity<sup>63</sup>; the Bhīma Ratha, dedicated to Viṣṇu, has an oblong, barreled roof, known as a **śālā** roof, of the same style as a Buddhist **chaitya** cave<sup>64</sup>; the Dharmarāja Ratha is the largest of the five and is square in plan, of three-stories bordered by miniature buildings and surmounted by an octagonal dome, the upper storey containing a relief of Somāskanda, usually attributed to the reign of Narasimhavarman II (690-728)<sup>65</sup>, and an image of Harihara which occurs in conjunction with Narasimhavarman I's name, again indicating the integration of the deity and the sovereign in Pallava art; and finally, the Sahadeva Ratha, a smaller version of the Bhīma Ratha, which sits slightly to the east of the others, and, although the original deity associated with this temple is uncertain, Huntington suggests that it may have been dedicated to Caṇḍeśa<sup>66</sup>.

The apparent<sup>ly</sup> experimental style of these monuments suggests that they were not used as places of worship but served a more practical purpose. According to Louis Frederic<sup>67</sup>, the Rathas represent models submitted for royal approbation, the Dharmarāja Ratha, although incomplete, serving as a model for the structural



Kailāsanātha Temple at Kāñcī. Even the main structural temple at Māmallapuram, the Shore Temple, built during the reign of Narasimhavarman II of sandstone, with granite for the floors and steps, displays a developed style suggestive of earlier examples made of perishable materials<sup>68</sup>. The central shrine of this temple is dedicated to Śiva, but although it belongs to the **bhakti** period, as with the other shrines at Māmallapuram, it is not included amongst the 274 shrines of the Śaiva **bhakti** hymns. Although Māmallapuram is today visited by thousands of pilgrims annually it appears to have served, at the outset, as an experimental site for the development of architectural styles in stone, based upon earlier examples from Buddhist architecture and wood construction, and the omission of these shrines from the **bhakti** hymns, at such an important Pallava locality, further suggests that the sacredness of the **bhakti** shrines derives not from any association with sovereignty but from a more established and ancient source.

The centre of Pallava power was Kāñcī (modern Conjeevaram), situated 45 miles south-west of Madras, in Chingleput District. It is one of the most ancient and sacred cities in Hinduism and is known to the Caṅkam literature as a place famous for its temples and religious festivals: "... in the world this town (Kacci) of olden glory, has a number of festivals where many people worship" (Perump.11:410-11)<sup>69</sup>. It had been an important seat of learning for many centuries prior to the rise of the Pallava dynasty, and, from as early as 300BCE, was particularly influenced by Buddhism<sup>70</sup>.

The earliest surviving temple in the city is the Kāilāsanātha Temple, a structural temple dedicated to Ardhanārīśvara Śiva<sup>71</sup>. The central shrine was constructed under the patronage of Narasimhavarman II, and a small shrine in front of the main sanctuary was erected by his son, Mahendravarman II. The central shrine is square in plan with a tower of several stories (**vimāna**) in the shape

of a Buddhist **vihāra**. It is situated beside an open columned hall which was originally detached from the main sanctuary but has since been joined to it, and these structures are then surrounded by a wall created by a number of minor shrines, each of which is dedicated to a different deity. The developed style is similar to that of the Shore Temple and testifies not only to the influence of Buddhist architecture, despite the typically Pallava style in which it is expressed, but also to the existence of a precedent in ephemeral materials<sup>72</sup>. Comparisons of Pallava kings and gods are frequent on this temple, particularly between Narasimhavarman II and his father Parameśvara (669-690)<sup>73</sup>, and Skanda and Śiva. However, although Kāñcī is an important pilgrimage centre for a number of the **bhaktas**, the **Kāliāsanātha Temple**, which is both Śaivite and of the period of the **bhakti** hymns, is not one of the shrines about which the Nāyanmārs sang.

Of the five temples associated with the poets in the city<sup>74</sup>, the most famous is the Ēkambara Temple, located near the Vegavati river, which traces its origins to a single mango tree in the courtyard under which Śiva is said to have appeared before Pārvatī when she prayed to him. Although the earliest inscription in the temple states that it was constructed in the sixth year of the reign of Kulottuṅga-Cōla II, that is in 1141, in a ruined **maṇḍapa** of the third **prākāra** the remains of a few stone pillars, one embossed with a lotus-medallion and another inscribed with **birudas** of Mahendravarman I, have been found incorporated into the structure, which indicate that these pillars were used in structures primarily built of bricks-and-mortar (**mūla-sthāna**)<sup>75</sup>. This may signify that Mahendravarman had the original temple constructed, but the fact that both Appar and Campantar, who belong to the 7th century, sing of this temple in a manner which implies that it was a well-established shrine, suggests that Mahendra may have embellished an extistent structure, although the architectural evidence is insufficient to draw any firm conclusions.

Tirukkalukkunram ("Hill of the Kites") is a temple situated on the summit of a hill nine miles to the south-east of Chingleput. It is known to the Tēvāram poets and it is also where Māṇikkavācakar is traditionally said to have had Śiva appear before him. The central shrine is built of three huge slabs of stone cleaved by traditional firing methods, which now form its inner walls, with a roof slab on top, although the exterior of the shrine was later encased in stone by the Cōlas. The walls have bas-relief sculptures of Somāskanda, Dakṣiṇa-mūrti Nandin and Caṇḍikeśvara, indicating the period of Parameśvara or Narasimhavarman II<sup>76</sup>, and are again representative of the implicit association between the king and god attributed to the Pallava rulers. In a cave temple (**Orukal-maṇḍapa**) to the east, fifty steps down from the summit, assigned to the reign of Narasimhavarman I<sup>77</sup>, there is an inscription which refers to a grant given by Skandaśishya Pallava, an early ancestor of the Pallavas, to a **mūla-sthāna** construction located somewhere at Tirukkalukkunram. According to Srinivasan this temple no longer exists, the stone temple on the summit of the hill having replaced it<sup>78</sup>. However, Jagadisa Ayyar believes the hill-top shrine and the **mūla-sthāna** temple to be identical<sup>79</sup>, and, as is evidenced by the monument stones, the Tamils were already well-versed in the cleaving of stone slabs, both the method of construction, and the religiously significant location of this temple, on the summit of a hill, suggesting that it is, in fact, a very early shrine. It is possible, therefore, that the Pallavas of the late 7th and early 8th centuries embellished an existent structure with plaster and paintings, thereby associating it with the royal rulers, particularly since stone was being used in an altogether different fashion at Māmallapuram and Kāñcī during this period, for the construction of the Shore and Kāilāsanātha temples.

The most celebrated of all the Śaiva **bhakti** shrines is located in territory which came under the control of the Pallavas when they

conquered the Cōḷa district under Siṃhaviṣṇu I. Cidambaram or Tillai, now known simply as Kōyil (temple), is dedicated to Naṭarāja Śiva, and is situated 150 miles south of Madras in South Arcot District, between the mouths of the Vellar and Coleroon rivers. From the architectural evidence it cannot be ascertained whether the Pallavas played any part in the original construction of the shrine because no buildings survive from this period. Although rare inscriptions from early reigns are found on stones incorporated into later structures, the oldest intact inscription belongs to the 44th year of Kulottuṅga-Cōḷa I, ie 1114 <sup>CE</sup>~~AD~~, and his successors totally replaced the older portions of the temple, rendering it impossible to (accurately) date the shrine. <sup>accurately</sup> However, the **bhakti** poets frequently sing of the glories of Śiva in his manifestation at Tillai, and the tone of their hymns suggests that it was already a famous shrine, at least by the beginning of the 7th century. In one hymn by Appar he refers to a brahman community at Tillai, the **tillai mūvāyiravar** or "*the three thousand brahmans of Tillai*", and calls the shrine the "*home of brahmins*"<sup>80</sup>, which suggests that it may have originally been a **brahmadēya** created by the Pallavas as they sought to expand their political control southwards. However, Cidambaram is unique amongst South Indian temples in that it is administered by a priestly community, the Diksitaras, who are not the employees of anyone else, indicating that the shrine was not the gift of a political ruler but was, in fact, originally an autonomous institution. The temple cannot, therefore, be considered to have been a **brahmadēya**, and it is possible that a community of religious specialists have been at the site since the remote past, and represent the descendents of an original group of cultic specialists which adapted and compromised with Brahmanism, integrating with the tradition in order to survive<sup>81</sup>. The origins of the shrine may also be reflected in the names given to the temple. Tillai is the Tamil term for a tree of the genus *Excoecaria*



*Agallocha* and, although Tillai is unknown to the Caṅkam literature as a specific place, Marr has suggested that a passage in *Puraṇānūru* (252:1,7)<sup>82</sup>, in which the poet compares *caṭai*, with the sense of matted hair, to the fronds of the Tillai tree, may indicate that this tree was associated with Śiva from an early period. The shrine was also originally known by the Tamil term *Cir\_rampalam*, or the "Little Hall", although this was later replaced by the Sanskrit word *Cidambaram*, "Heavenly Abode of the Spirit", possibly to lend the temple greater status because it was located beside a shrine to the Goddess known as *Perampalam*, or the "Great Hall"<sup>83</sup>. However, taken together, the two Tamil names suggest that the origins of the temple may stem from a small shrine dedicated to a dancing Śiva, located beneath a Tillai tree, or in a grove of such trees<sup>84</sup>.

The *bhakti* hymns mention a total of 32 shrines in *Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam*, and six of the *Nāyaṇmārs* belong to the region, the heartland of Pallava territory<sup>85</sup>. And yet, despite the rapid development of Pallava architecture from ca.600 CE, there is little architectural evidence which associates the temples of the Pallavas with the *bhakti* shrines. However, there is literary evidence which directly associates an early Pallava king with a number of *bhakti* temples. According to the *Periya Purāṇam* the *Nāyaṇār Aiyāḍigal Kāḍavarkōṇ*, whose hymns are included in the eleventh *Tirumuṟai* under the name of *Ksēttiratuveṇbā*, was a Pallava king who has been identified as *Simhavarman*, the father of *Simhaviṣṇu I*. He is said to have entrusted his kingdom to his son and spent his remaining days as a devotee of Śiva visiting a number of sacred places associated with the God. Of the places about which he sang 24 have been identified and they include the *Nāgēśvara Temple* at *Kumbhakōṇam*, *Kuttālam*, *Tiruppanandāl* and *Tiruvayāru* in Tanjore District by the *Kāverī* river, part of the *Cōla* country which did not become annexed to the Pallava kingdom until the reign of his son, indicating that these shrines must

have been established prior to 540 CE, and several years before the introduction of rock-cutting and stone-building skills into the south under the patronage of Mahendravarman.

### *The Pāṇṭiyas*

The second important kingdom of the **bhakti** period was the Pāṇṭiyan dynasty which was centred ~~around~~<sup>at</sup> Maturai in the south of Tamiḻnāṭu. Unlike the Pallavas they were one of the ruling dynasties of the early Caṅkam period, although they lost their control over the southern section of the country during the Kaḷabhra "interregnum", a period associated with Jain and Buddhist religious dominance in the south. They rose to prominence again in the last quarter of the 6th century under the leadership of Kaṭuṅkōṇ (590-620CE)<sup>86</sup>, and were then almost continually in conflict with the Pallavas to the north.

Little is known of Pāṇṭiyan art and architecture although a number of rock-cut **maṇḍapas** have been identified with their reign. The most impressive Pāṇṭiyan monument is an unfinished rock-cut temple at Kaḷugumalai, which dates to the 8th century. This temple is essentially a free-standing building cut out from the surrounding matrix of rock, and it closely resembles the Kailāsanātha Temple at Ellora built during the second half of the 8th century by Rāshtrakūṭa Kṛṣṇa I. It is a Śaiva shrine, and includes, in its iconography, a depiction of Skanda as a **guru-murti**<sup>87</sup>. Despite the fact that this temple was never completed, it would have required a great deal of the skill and resources of the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom, but, although it is of the **bhakti** period, it is not a **bhakti** shrine.

The most famous shrine associated with the Pāṇṭiyas is Tiruparaṅkunram, which, as we have seen, features prominently in the later Caṅkam literature as a Murukaṇ shrine, and which, unlike the majority of the sacred sites of the Pallavas, has both an ancient and documented history. The Paripāṭal contains references to a Pāṇṭiyan

king worshipping Murukan here, indicating that the royal dynasty participated in the Murukan cult in the late classical period (5th-7th century), and, as the quotation from Puṛan.55, given above in reference to Centil, demonstrates, they were also associated with Murukan religion in the earlier classical period (see above p.56). However, there are no early existent Pāṇṭiyan shrines at Paraṅkunram which have Murukan as the pre-eminent deity, although, as the Paripāṭal makes clear, his worship in the late classical period was still closely associated with trees, suggesting that the original Murukan shrine at the site was of this nature. One of the earliest existent Pāṇṭiyan shrines is a rock-cut **maṇḍapa** dating to the late 8th century, which has, as its central figure, a sculpting in rock of Durgā. She is flanked by Subrahmaṇya to the left and Viṇāyakar to the right, with a further cell to either side, the left being Vaiṣṇava and the right Śaiva, the Śaiva cell containing a rock-cut Somāskanda also ascribable to the late 8th century<sup>88</sup>. This **maṇḍapa**, located at the foot of the hill, serves as the inner sanctum to the present Subrahmaṇya temple, and this tendency to development, found at the majority of South Indian temples, may indicate that a sacred cave or an earlier, perishable temple-structure existed at the site prior to the construction of the rock-cut shrine, although the fact that the main figure in the **maṇḍapa** is Durgā suggests that the original deity was the ferocious, indigenous Goddess Korravai. Near the summit of the hill there is a shrine dedicated to Śiva, assigned to 733 CE<sup>89</sup>, which contains a rock-cut panelling of the deity, with, in three subsidiary cells, sculptures of Skanda, Durgā and Gaṇeśa. However, although Tiruparaṅkunram is a **bhakti** site, a number of the hymns in praise of it pre-date this temple<sup>90</sup>, and, in the development of this particular **bhakti** shrine, it is conceivable that it was the close association between Paraṅkunram and Murukan worship, as well as the ancient nature of the site, attested to by both literary and inscriptional

evidence, and its symbolically significant location on a hill, which were the most important criteria.

The main Śaiva shrine in Maturai, the ancient capital city of the Pāṇṭiyan dynasty, is Ālavāy, a temple which has been developed to such an extent over the centuries that its origins are impossible to establish. However, despite the absence of architectural evidence for Pāṇṭiyan involvement in the construction of this temple, the importance of the shrine to the Śaiva *bhaktas* is demonstrated in their hymns, particularly those of Campantar, who dedicates a number of hymns to Ālavāy, which indicate that it was already an established temple in the 7th century:

*"This is the rich temple (Ālavāy) with tall towers,  
place of worship for Kulaccirai,  
who honors and serves Śiva's devotees,  
whether they are alone or in pilgrim bands."  
Cam III.378.4.<sup>91</sup>*

Campantar's hymns in praise of Ālavāy are mainly in the context of his conversion from Jainism to Śaivism of the king of Maturai, identified by Nilakanta Sastri as Arikēcari Pārāṅkuca Māṇavarman (670-700CE - see above Chp.1, p.11), and said to have been at the request of the queen, Maṅkaiyarkkaraci, and the prime minister, Kulaccirai, whose devotion to Śiva he commends in his hymns. In the following hymn, he mentions the queen in conjunction with a reference to Elephant Hill, or Ānaimalai, situated close to the city, and, at that time, a Jain sacred site:

*"Doe-eyed lady, Great Pāṇḍyan queen, listen!  
Do not fear for my safety, thinking me a child,  
barely weaned.  
With Aran of Ālavāy by my side,  
I will easily defeat those scoundrels  
who practice many tortuous rites  
living on Elephant and other hills!"  
Cam III.297.1.<sup>92</sup>*



Campantar's exploits with the Jains have been greatly exaggerated by the tradition<sup>93</sup>, although his hymns do describe the antagonism he felt towards them, and make frequent references to the terrible effects of Jainism upon both the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom and himself. According to the tradition the conversion of the king resulted from an incident in which the Jains tried to set fire to Campantar's house whereupon he miraculously directed the heat onto the king, who was overcome by a fever which was only cured through the application of sacred ash by Campantar, resulting in his conversion to Śaivism - the poet himself mentions the "*flame kindled by the crooked Jains to burn me*", and asks Śiva to "*turn it toward the Pandyan king instead*"<sup>94</sup>. Campantar's hymns illustrate that Jainism was still exerting a strong influence on the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom nearly a century after the re-emergence of the Pāṇṭiyas as a powerful political force in the south, the period known as the Tamil "renaissance" and commonly associated with the decline of the heterodox faiths, and that the Pāṇṭiyan monarchs, whilst participating in the Murukan tradition, as witnessed by the Paripāṭal, must also have lent royal support to Jainism. It is possible that, whilst the **bhakti** movement was already widely accepted at a popular level in Pāṇṭiya-nāṭu, gradually subsuming much which had previously been attributed to the Murukan cult, that **bhakti** did not gain full access to the royal court until at least the time of Campantar, and only with the complete decline of Jain influence in the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom. It seems likely, therefore, that Pāṇṭiyan involvement in the construction of temples to Śiva post-dates the period of Campantar, and, as the architectural evidence for the temples at Kaḷugumalai and Paraṅkunram indicates, it was not until the middle of the 8th century that Śiva was being depicted as one of the pre-eminent deities in Pāṇṭiyan art, by which time Murukan had been fully adapted to the Śaiva pantheon as Śiva's son Skanda. This further suggests that Purāṇic kingship, with the king in the role of

protector of Purāṇic religion, involving temple-endowment as a constituent element, did not effect any major impression on the monarchy of the southernmost Tamil kingdom until at least a century after its initial impact in the Pallava kingdom to the north, possibly as a consequence of the continuing prevalence of Jainism. The fourteen Śaiva **bhakti** shrines in the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom do not, therefore, appear to owe their origins to temple-endowment associated with Purāṇic kingship, many of the literary references in the **bhakti** hymns preceding any evidence for Pāṇṭiyan involvement in the construction of the shrines, or, as seems to be the case with a number of temples, situated at sites appropriated from the Jains (see below p.85), although **bhakti** Śaivism must have been well-established in the region by the time of Māṇikkavācakar<sup>95</sup>.

#### *The Cōḷa Environment*

The majority of the Śaiva **bhakti** shrines are located in the Kāverī River Delta Region - there are 127 shrines situated on the south bank of the Kāverī and 63 on the north bank, nearly two thirds of the total number and indicative of the importance of the region to the **bhakti** movement. This area was the heartland of the early Cōḷa dynasty, who ruled over it from the twin capitals of Kāveripaṭṭinam, on the east coast, and Uṛaiyūr, part of modern Trichinopoly, until they were conquered by the Pallavas at the end of the 6th century. According to Nilakanta Sastri, they "*continued to lead an obscure existence on the banks of the Kāverī*" for the following three centuries, eventually defeating the Pallavas in 850 CE<sup>96</sup>.

Although there is no architectural evidence which associates the early Cōḷas with the foundation of any of the **bhakti** shrines, there is literary and inscriptional evidence that an early Cōḷa king, Kōccengaṇān, who probably lived in the latter half of the 6th century CE, was involved in the construction of a number of temples to Śiva.

He is known to the Caṅkam literature, which tells of how he distinguished himself in battle in a late portion of the *Puranānūru* (74), but he is also traditionally held by Śaivites to be a Nāyaṇār. The tradition concerning his involvement in the erection of temples is based upon a verse in the *Periya Tirumoli*, by Tirumaṅkai-Ālvār<sup>97</sup>, which relates how Kōccengaṇān, known as Śengaṇān, offered worship to Viṣṇu at Tirunaraiyūr and constructed seventy temples to Śiva, and it is supported by a number of references to Śengaṇān in the hymns of Campantar and Cuntarar, which state that he founded the Śaiva temples at Ambari, Vaigal and Nannilam. In *Tirunaḷḷaru*, Appar is aware of a further tradition surrounding the life of this Nāyaṇār in a previous incarnation, in which he is said to have been a spider who so pleased Śiva by weaving him a canopy to provide shade from the sun that he gave him rebirth as a king:

*Upon the death of the spider Āṇaikkā  
who had made a sacred canopy for his god,  
the Lord of the Vīraṭṭānam shrine in Kurukkai  
gave him rebirth as King Kōccenkaṇān,  
in the race of the Cōḷas of Cōṇāṭu  
where the Kāverī flows, mingling with many streams.  
App IV.49.4.<sup>98</sup>*

The temples he is accredited with constructing, therefore, must have been established prior to the 7th century, and long enough before Appar to allow the tradition of his past life to become established. His involvement in temple construction is further supported by the Anbil plates of Sundara Cōḷa which state that Kōccengaṇān built temples all over the country, including the famous Jambukeśvaram Temple at Tiruvānaikkāval, the name of which may derive from a forest of **jambu** trees originally located at the site<sup>99</sup>.

The majority of the population in Cōḷa territory lived in prosperous agricultural communities, sustained by the natural fertility of the Kāverī Delta, and the region appears to have been less affected

than the kingdoms to the north and south by the political and religious upheavals of the Kaḷabhra period, which had a greater influence upon the trade-dominated cultures of the cities<sup>100</sup>, suggesting that there was a greater degree of cultural continuity in this region from the 4th-6th centuries, the centuries which immediately preceded the rise of the **bhakti** movement, than in the rest of Tamiḷnāṭu. The fact that Śiva was perceived as a preeminent deity by the time of Kōccengaṇān further suggests that, in the absence of substantial Buddhist and Jain influence in the Kāverī basin, there was a steady expansion of Brahmanical influence amongst the agricultural groups of the area<sup>101</sup>, resulting in the assimilation by the Brahmanical tradition of the local indigenous deities, and, ultimately, with the emergence of the **bhakti** movements. That Śaiva **bhakti** has its roots in the Cōḷa environment is further suggested by the fact that four of the earliest and most important Nāyaṇmārs, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār and the three poets of the Tēvāram, are said to belong to the Cōḷa country<sup>102</sup>, and it was to this area that the Pallava, Aiyāḍigaḷ Kāḍavarkōn, is said to have come as a devotee of Śiva before it became part of Pallava territory. It is also of some interest that the tradition of Campantar's conversion of the Pāṇṭiyan King of Maturai from Jainism to Śaivism, was at the request of his queen, who was, in fact, a Cōḷa princess: "...Maṅkaiyarkkaraci, lotus-lady, Pāṇḍyan queen and princess of the Cōḷa clan..." (Cam III.378.1)<sup>103</sup>. However, as noted in the introduction, whilst accepting much which derived from Brahmanical religion, the **bhakti** movement in many ways represented a reaction against Brahmanical values, and the re-assertion of much which derived from the earlier cultural tradition. In their hymns, the **bhaktas** glorify the beauty of the Kāverī river and the Cōḷa environment in a similar manner to that of the earlier Caṅkam poetic tradition, and the fact that Kōccengaṇān was a king acclaimed in the indigenous literature, and praised by Appar as a ruler of Cōḷa-nāṭu,



a political division attributed to the classical period of Tamiḷnāṭu, suggests that, until their defeat by the Pallavas at the end of the 6th century, the Cōḷa monarchy was based on the classical Tamil pattern of kingship. Kōccengaṇān, therefore, whilst apparently lending royal support to the nascent **bhakti** movement, was also a king of the classical Tamil age, and his status as a religious figure within the **bhakti** tradition further suggests that he participated in the Śaiva tradition as a devotee, and not, in the manner of Purāṇic kingship, as the sovereign counterpart of the deity on earth.

As we have seen, the fundamental change in the conception of sovereignty which took place in South India from ca.600 CE, based upon the ritual equivalence of the king as ruler and protector of his subjects on earth and God, in the form of Viṣṇu or Śiva, as his celestial counterpart, resulted in the sudden proliferation of rock-cut and stone-built temples in Tamiḷnāṭu. However, few of these temples, many of which are analogous in time with the **bhakti** hymns, are associated with the **bhakti** movement, and their primary function appears to have been an attempt to legitimize the role of the sovereign. There is also evidence which suggests that those which are **bhakti** shrines, for example, the shrines at Tiruparaṅkunram and Tirukkalankunram, are located at sites considered sacred by the earlier cultural tradition. The architectural evidence from Māmallapuram, together with the inscription on the Maṇḍagapaṭṭu rock-cut temple of Mahendravarman's reign, further suggests that Pallava temple-building owes a debt not only to Buddhist architecture but to temples constructed in impermanent materials, which may represent an earlier phase in Tamil temple architecture available to the Tamil kingdoms which preceded them. There is limited evidence that the early Cōḷa dynasty, which belongs to the classical period of Tamil

culture, was involved in the promotion and promulgation of **bhakti** Śaivism, including the construction of a number of temples. The Cōḷa kingdom appears to have enjoyed a greater degree of cultural stability in the centuries preceding the rise of the **bhakti** movement than that of the Pāṇṭiyas to the south and Pallavas to the north, the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom apparently still deeply influenced by Jainism in the latter half of the 7th century. Brahmanical religion, on the other hand, unhindered by any major impact of Buddhism and Jainism in the Cōḷa region, seems to have gained wide acceptance amongst the agricultural communities of the Kāverī Delta, peacefully adapting and integrating with the indigenous tradition, with the result that, by the end of the 6th century CE, Śiva was perceived as one of the principal deities in Cōḷa territory. However, although a monarch of the early Cōḷa dynasty is attributed with the construction of a number of temples to Śiva, the evidence suggests that Kōccengaṇān was a sovereign of the classical Tamil tradition, and it seems doubtful that these temples were representative of the ritual equivalence between the sovereign and the deity associated with Purāṇic kingship, or gifted to facilitate the expansion of Cōḷa dominance into territory they did not control, particularly in view of the fact that, by the close of the 6th century, they were politically, and, by implication, economically, vulnerable, a position which eventually resulted in their defeat by the Pallavas. It is possible, however, that Kōccengaṇān's involvement in temple-construction represented royal participation in the Śaiva tradition as a devotee, the temples ascribed to him illustrative of the continuing trend towards the reification of the deity in specific, named shrines in the Tamil land. A number of **bhakti** shrines, therefore, may owe their origins to the efforts of the indigenous sovereigns of the Cōḷa region, although, unfortunately, the perishable nature of these early shrines and the tendency for South Indian temples to develop upon the original structure make it impossible to trace the true history of the early Cōḷa

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temples.

*Did the Nāyanmārs Sing the Shrines Into Existence?*

Although the Nāyanmārs' poetry is, in most instances, the earliest evidence for a shrine as a Śaiva shrine, it is probable that shrines similar to those in present day Indian villages would have been found at each village in areas such as the densely populated Kāverī Delta Region at the time of the **bhakti** movement, and, in their hymns, the **bhaktas** frequently allude to the local tradition - according to Shulman, "...the *Tēvāram* poems of any given shrine reveal the local cult in a mature form, with the names and in many cases the major myths of the local deities already established"<sup>104</sup>. It is possible, therefore, that the **bhaktas** appropriated existent shrines, adapting the local mythos to the Brahmanical tradition, and thereby universalising the local deity. The distinctive characteristics of Śiva at each individual shrine may be the result of this synthesis between the indigenous and Brahmanical traditions, although the theological status of the God, that is His Oneness, is the same at every shrine. There is also an obscure reference in a hymn by Campantar which relates how Śiva brought rain to the peasants, and received land from them, which further suggests that the **bhaktas** acquired land from the local population for their cause:

"When the rains failed,  
 and the peasants implored you, crying,  
 'Save us! Give us water for our fields,  
 and we will give you much land!' -  
 you spread over the sky as a shining white cloud  
 pouring torrential rain,  
 then you yourself dammed the flood,  
 and took twelve more *vēlis* of land.  
 Seeing your act of grace,  
 I have come to your holy feet,  
 You who live in holy *Punkūr* of fertile groves!"  
 Cun VII.55.2.<sup>105</sup>

In many instances the actual names of the **bhakti** temples reflect the background of the shrines, and again suggest the persistence of the earlier cultural tradition rather than any revolutionary change. The continuing association of the **bhakti** shrines with trees is reflected in names such as Tillai and Jambukeśvaram, and in the suffixes **-kātu** and **-poḷil**, which mean "forest" and "grove" respectively, included in the titles of a number of shrines in the Tēvāram. The temples of Kaccūrāḷakkōyil, Valampuram, Ālaṅkātu, Ālantūr and Ālampoḷil, amongst others, which encompass **al**, or "banyan tree", in their names, further recall the earlier Caṅkam association between the deity and the banyan tree:

*O Lord, you sat under the spreading banyan tree  
and taught the sacred Law  
at the beautiful temple, the auspicious temple,  
the Ālakkōyil temple  
in the northern part of cool Pūṅkaccūr town!*  
Cun.VII.41.3.<sup>106</sup>

The titles of several other temples derive from certain features, either of the temple itself or the surrounding landscape. A number of temples in the Tēvāram are referred to as **peruṅkōyil**, from the Tamil **perum** "large" or "great" (eg. Nallūrp Perumaṇam), and **iḷaṅkōyil**, from **iḷam** "young", terms indicative of the length of time a particular temple had been established prior to the composition of the **bhakti** hymns. In a hymn by Appar he refers explicitly to a newly built temple, Mīyaccūr Iḷaṅkōyil, whilst also indicating the status of a number of other shrines:

*"There are man-made temples  
and natural shrines,  
and temples of many other kinds;  
but see, here is a fine temple  
for Araṇ with the cool, matted red hair,  
who vanquished death -  
the new shrine (iḷaṅkōyil) at Mīyaccūr."*  
App.V.125<sup>107</sup>



Several names are consistent with the Caṅkam poetic division of the landscape into the five *tiṇais*. The majority of the shrines located in the mountain regions, the *kuriñcī tiṇai*, end with the suffixes -*malai* "mountain" or -*kunram* "hill", such as *Aṇṇāmalai*, *Kōnamalai*, *Paraṅkunram*, and *Kalukkunram*. The most frequently used adjuncts in the *Tēvāram*, in accordance with the actual distribution of the shrines, are -*ur* "village" (eg. *Ārūr*, *Kūrūr*, *Nīrūr*, *Ninriyūr*, *Kunriyūr*, *Kāṭṭūr*, *Kaṭampūr*, *Kōṭṭūr*, *Pērūr*, *Pācūr*), and -*āru* "river" (*Muttāru*, *Aiyāru*)<sup>108</sup>, which serve to evoke the *marutam* landscape of areas such as the *Kāverī Delta*. In contrast to this situation there are few hymns suggestive of the *pālai tiṇai* or "wasteland", far from human habitation, although references to such temples do occur and include the temple at *Iṭaiccūram* (*Rameśvaram*), from -*curam* "parched, barren tract".

There are also a number of references to shrines ending with the suffix -*paḷḷi*. A *pāḷi* was the "site of a Jain temple or settlement", and these shrines may have originated as Jain sacred sites or monasteries which were appropriated by the *bhakti* movement with the demise of Jainism. Petersen has further suggested that these temples may also originate from ancient shrines built as burial mounds for heroes and kings<sup>109</sup>, indicating that a number of *bhakti* temples were established at sites associated with monument stones and the earlier Caṅkam cult of hero worship. Campantar I.5., for example, is dedicated to the temple of *Kāṭṭuppaḷḷi*, and, in another hymn, he devotes one verse entirely to shrines which end with this suffix:

*"Arappaḷḷi, Akattiyānpaḷḷi, Kāṭṭuppaḷḷi,  
dwellings of the ash-smeared god who bears the river,  
Cirappaḷḷi, Cirāppaḷḷi, Cemponpaḷḷi, holy Nanipaḷḷi,  
fine Makēntirappaḷḷi, town of the birthless one,  
Iṭaippaḷḷi, beloved abode of the river-haired Lord,  
and the "paḷḷi" where he gave the wheel  
to Māl who worshipped him -  
simple heart! Meditate on these!"*

Cam II.175.4.<sup>110</sup>

The suffix **-turai** "resting place, path or meeting place", but also "beach or riverbed", occurs a total of twenty times in the *Tēvāram* (eg. *Āvaṭuturai*, *Ālanturai*). According to Petersen, Cam II.246 to *Mānturai* signifies a mango tree (*mā*) located at a beach or riverbed<sup>111</sup>, although C.V.Narayana Ayyar has argued that **-turai** is indicative of the fact that, by the time of the **bhakti** period, temples had developed at sacred sites which were originally situated at resting places for travellers<sup>112</sup>. Such resting places, which are reminiscent of the **potiyil**, may have been located on pilgrimage routes to shrines and temples already famous in the *Caṅkam* period, such as *Tiruparaṅkunram* and *Kāñcī*, and have later developed into towns and villages with temples famous in their own right because the sanctity attached to them attracted a settled population. The phenomenon of pilgrimage is a Pan-Indian motif, older than the *Nāyanmārs*, and a major topic in the *Dharmaśāstras* and *Purāṇas*. It is also known to the *Caṅkam* literature - in the *Patirrupattu*, for example, there is a description of people travelling together in order to worship *Māyōṇ*:

*"In the world that is the ocean-clad earth wedded to the hill peaks, the people together carry their hands (folded above) their heads, make a noise that rises in the four directions and resounds, beat the bell that emits high clear sound like kāl, fast, reach the banks of the cold, clear, water (to bathe) and worship the feet of god."*

Pat.31<sup>113</sup>

Pilgrimage, therefore, was a well-established religious practice in both north and south India by the time of the **bhakti** movement, and a number of the *Nāyanmārs* hymns indicate that the **bhaktas** also participated in the custom - for example, in a hymn by Appar he sings: *"Let us hasten to make a proper pilgrimage, to offer worship at Ēkampam in Kacci of flowering groves"*<sup>114</sup>. It seems reasonable to conclude that the **bhaktas** would also have visited temples along fixed pilgrimage routes, singing the praises of the shrine as they travelled to the more famous temples, and this may account for at least some of the temples which include **-turai** in their names.

Although it is a special feature of the Nāyanmār's poetry to name the temples in their hymns, the majority of the **bhakti** shrines appear to have been established prior to the **bhakti** movement and derive from the indigenous South Indian cultural tradition which located the divine in the natural world. The origins of the shrines are, however, by no means monolithic. Several shrines appear to have acquired their sanctity from their symbolic location within the landscape, in particular those situated on hills, or derived from the worship of a sacred pillar, the **kantu**, a symbol of divine presence, whilst others originate from different phenomena thought to manifest the sacred, including stones and trees, for which there is also contemporary evidence in the form of village shrines. The actual temple-building seems to have been of secondary importance to the worship of the deity in the early Caṅkam period, although a number of temples may have originated from the enclosure of a specially demarcated spot where the indigenous priest invoked Murukan and became possessed by the deity, and the **potiyil**, which served the dual purpose of a place of worship of the **kantu** and accommodation for travellers, may also represent an early, indigenous Tamil temple - the evidence for pilgrimage in the Caṅkam literature and the implications of the suffix **-turai** in the **bhakti** hymns further suggest that the **potiyil** may have served as a resting place for pilgrims, rather than secular wayfarers, and that its purpose was entirely religious. The actual temple-structures, however, were necessarily constructed of impermanent materials or located in natural caves prior to the 7th century and the introduction of rock-cutting and stone-building techniques to the south. As a result of the increasing influence of Brahmanical religion in the south, in particular in the Cōla region, which was least affected by the Kalabhra period and its close association with Buddhism and Jainism, by the middle of the 6th century Śiva was perceived as one of the preeminent deities in the religious awareness of the Tamils, and there was also a greater concern with the localization of the divine into specific, named

temples, witnessed on the literary level in the Paripāṭal and the TMP. However, whilst Śiva is a deity of the Purāṇic tradition, temple-endowment associated with Purāṇic kingship, an essential feature of which was the identification of the presiding deity and the sovereign, does not appear to have been initiated in the Tamil region until the reign of Mahendravarman Pallava, and the permanent temples both he and his successors are associated with are either not acclaimed by the **bhakti** poets, or, in most instances, post-date evidence for the shrine as a **bhakti** shrine. The shrines of the Nāyaṇmārs' hymns represent the culmination of the trend towards the concretisation of the divine into designated temples, although, as the evidence indicates, they were either situated at sites considered sacred by the earlier tradition, or located at existent temples, originally dedicated to indigenous deities, and appropriated by the **bhaktas** from the local population for their cause. The distinctive feature of the Śaiva **bhakti** poetry is the naming of temples in the hymns, but they also represent the continuation of an ancient ideology which located the sacred "*within the confines of earthly reality*"<sup>115</sup>, and worshipped the deity in the natural phenomena of the Tamil landscape. The **bhaktas**, therefore, cannot be said to have sung the shrines into existence, but are indebted to the earlier tradition, the numerous shrines reflecting a love of the landscape, and the awareness of divine immanence apparent in the Caṅkam literature.



1. For a complete list of the 274 Śaiva **bhakti** shrines see J.V.Jagadisa Ayyar *South Indian Shrines*, Madras 1920, pp.243-259. The actual distribution of the shrines is: 190 in Cōla Nāṭu; 14 in Pāṇṭiya Nāṭu; 7 in Koṅku Nāṭu; 32 in Toṇṭai Nāṭu; 22 in Nāṭu Nāṭu; 1 in Cēra Nāṭu; 1 in Tuḷu Nāṭu; 5 in Northern India; and 2 in Iḷam (Sri Lanka).
2. A.K.Ramanujan "Hymns for the Drowning - poems for Viṣṇu by Nammālṽr" translated from the Tamil, Princeton University Press 1981, p.107.
3. Hardy, 1983, p.137.
4. K.R.Srinivasan "Some Aspects of Religion as Revealed by Early Monuments and Literature of the South", *Journal of the Madras University*, Section A: Humanities XXXII(I), July 1960, cited in Clothey, 1978, p.209, note 25.
5. See Hardy, 1983, pp.137-38.
6. Ibid. p.137.
7. Madras Tamil Lexicon Vol.2, p.719.
8. Hardy, 1983, p.138, n.77.
9. Clothey, 1978, p.27, citing the evidence of M.K.Thangavelu "Study in the Concept of God Muruga in Sangam Literature", unpublished thesis for M.Lit., University of Madras 1963, pp.166,171.
10. Clothey *ibid.* p.27.
11. Ibid. p.117.
12. Hardy, 1983, p.230.
13. Many difficulties are encountered when attempting to trace the history of a specific South Indian temple, not least because Hinduism has a tendency to associate sanctity with antiquity. The **sthalapurāṇas** attached to each temple relate quasi-historical and mythological events which serve to reinforce the ancient origin of the shrine rather than reveal its true historical past, and it is therefore difficult to accurately date a shrine. The main criteria for dating a temple are its particular architectural style, assisted by inscriptional evidence which, although it supplies dates for certain donations or for the construction of a specific structure, such as a tank or **maṇḍapa**, does not provide the date for the original shrine around which the temple complex has been built.
14. Hardy, 1983, p.193. His evidence is based on a reference in the text to "*Antuvan who sang about Paraṅkunram of Murukan*", ie. the author of Paripatal 8.
15. Ibid. p.194.
16. Zevelebil, 1973, pp.41-43, pp.60-61.

17. Chelliah, 1962, p.245.
18. Clothey, 1978, p.124, citing Clarence Maloney "The Beginnings of Civilisation in South India", *Journal of Asian Studies* XXIX(3), May 1970, pp.603-16.
19. Zvelebil, 1973, pp.42-43.
20. Marr, 1985, p.147.
21. Clothey, 1978, p.121, citing J.M.S.Pillai, *Tiruchendur: The Sea Shore Temple of Subrahmanya*, Madras, Addison Press 1948, p.17.
22. See Clothey *ibid.* p.122.
23. *Ibid.* p.118.
24. *Ibid.* pp.118-121.
25. For example, Chelliah (1962) renders TMP lines 319-324 as follows:  

*"...He (Murukan) lives in woods and groves  
 In inlets fine, in rivers and in lakes.  
 He lives in other spots too. He appears  
 Where many roads do meet, beneath the shades  
 of kadamba trees bearing blossoms new  
 And under trees where meet the village folk,  
 In public halls and in erected posts.  
 In spots like these are his abodes."*
26. Clothey, "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40, March 1972, pp.84-88.
27. Zvelebil, 1973, pp.42-43. See also p.59.
28. Trans. by Chelliah, 1962, p.297.
29. See D.Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Śaiva Tradition*, Princeton 1980.
30. G.L.Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their milieu and their Sanskrit counterparts*, Berkeley, California 1975, p.21.
31. Hardy, 1983, p.135.
32. Hart, 1975, p.22. See also A.Kandiah, "A Critical Study of Early Tamil Bhakti Literature with Special Reference to Tēvāram", PhD Dissertation, University of London 1974, p.141.
33. Kandiah *ibid.* p.141.
34. *Ibid.* p.84.

35. Hardy, 1983, p.136.
36. Vidvan G. Subramania Pillai, *Tree Worship and Ophiolatry*, Annamalai University Publication 1948, p.81.
37. Ibid. p.83.
38. Hart, 1975, p.17.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Kandiah, 1974, p.84.
42. The first allusions to this myth are found in Patirrupattu 11:5 where Murukan is described defeating the *cūra*, a male demon, with a shining sharp leaf. By the time of the *Pari.* and the *TMP* his weapon had evolved into a leaf-shaped lance, and the myth, whilst retaining a typically Tamil form, had become inextricably entwined with the mythology of the Epic Skanda, who destroyed the king of the *asuras*.
43. Kandiah, 1974, p.130.
44. Hardy, 1983, p.135.
45. Kailasapathy, 1968, p.62.
46. Hardy, 1983, p.135.
47. Kailasapathy, 1968, p.236.
48. Ibid. pp.236-37.
49. Ibid. p.235.
50. See K.R.Srinivasan and N.R.Banerjee, "Survey of South Indian Megaliths", *Ancient India* 9, 1953, pp.103-115; K.R.Srinivasan, "The Megalithic Burials and Urn-fields of South India in the Light of Tamil Literature and Tradition", *Ancient India* 2, 1946, pp.9-16; Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *The Birth of Indian Civilization: India and Pakistan before 500BC*, Harmondsworth 1968, p.223ff.
51. See N.Venkata Ramanaya, *An Essay on the Origin of the South Indian Temple*, Madras 1930, p.9.
52. L.S.S. O'Malley, *Popular Hinduism*, Cambridge University Press 1935, pp.141-142.
53. Venkata Ramanayya, 1930, p.5.
54. Nicholas B.Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, Cambridge University Press 1987, p.29 - see in particular pp.29-32. Also Burton Stein, "Brahman and Peasant in Early South Indian History", *Adyar Library Bulletin*

31-32, 1967-68, Supplement, pp.229-69.

55. The dates for Mahendravarman Pallava I are frequently given as 600-630CE and, as David Henige has shown, the approximate date for the end of Mahendra's reign is known from his own records, successors and contemporaneity with the Cālukya Pulakeśin II. There are, however, two inscriptions, one dated to the 33rd year of the reign of Siṃhaviṣṇu, and one to the 59th year of the reign of Mahendra, which reveal that these two kings ruled for a total of 92 years, at least, and therefore the date for the ascension of Siṃhaviṣṇu must have been prior to 540 CE, and, for Mahendra 571 CE, if not earlier. See David P.Henige, "Some Phantom Dynasties of Early and Medieval India: Epigraphic Evidence and the Abhorrence of a Vacuum", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38(1975), pp.252-549, p.547.

56. The earliest Pallava record issued from Kāñcī is the Mayidavōlu Plate of Śivaskandavarman which has been dated to 350 CE - see T.V.Mahalingam, *Kanchipuram in Early South Indian History*, Asia Publishing House, Madras 1968, p.18.

57. Nilakanta Sastri, 1958, p.144.

58. Nilakanta Sastri, 1935, p.125.

59. K.R.Srinivasan, "The Pallava Architecture of South India", *Ancient India* no.14, 1958, pp.114-138, p.119.

60. Susan L.Huntington, "Iconographic Reflections on the Arjuna Ratha", in J.G.Williams, ed., *Kalādarśana*, Leiden 1981, pp.57-67, p.63 and n.14 pp.64-65.

61. Nilakanta Sastri, 1958, p.440.

62. Huntington, 1981, p.57.

63. Ibid. p.60-64.

64. The śālā is a barrel-roofed pavilion, one of the earliest types of Indian structure known. It is depicted on the bas-reliefs from Bhārhut and in cross-section forms a **chaitya** arch (horse-shoe) "*seen on nearly every Indian monument from the Maurya period on*" - James C.Harle *Temple Gateways in South India: the Architecture and Iconography of the Cidambaram Gopuras*, Oxford 1963, p.9.

65. Huntington, 1981, p.61. The Somāskanda image depicts Śiva with Umā and Skanda. The dates for Narasimhavarman II, who is also known as Rajasimha, are those given by Huntington ibid.

66. Ibid. p.59 and n.15, p.65.

67. Louis Frederic *Indian Temples and Sculpture*, London 1959, p.187. See also K.R.Srinivasan, 1958, p.128: "...which was perhaps in Māmalla's time [ie.Nirasimhavarman I] a regional school of architecture and sculpture".

68. See Harle, 1963.



69. K.K.Young, 1978, p.266.

70. The full significance of Buddhism in the history of a number of sacred sites in the city has still to be fully realised. For example, recent excavations at the Kamakshiamman Temple in Kāñcī have uncovered the vestiges of a stupa, dating to 200-100 BCE, beneath the present shrine to the Goddess.

71. The figure of Ardhanārīśvara Śiva in this temple is unusual - the feminine aspect holds a **veena** (violin) in her hand whilst the male aspect is seated on a bull.

72. See Harle, 1963.

73. These dates are consistent with those Huntington gives for his son, Narasimhavarman II (ie 690-728 - see above n.65), although Srinivasan differs, and gives the dates for this monarch as 672-700CE (1958, p.132).

74. The five **bhakti** temples in Kāñcī are: Ēkambara (4 hymns by Cuntarar, 7 hymns by Appar, 1 by Campantar); Mērraḷi (1 hymn by Cuntarar, 1 by Appar); Ōṇakānteśvara (1 hymn by Cuntarar); Anēkataṅkāvatam (1 by Cuntarar); Nerikaraikkāṭu (1 by Campantar).

75. See Srinivasan, 1958, p.131.

76. According to Srinivasan (ibid., p.132) it was built during the reign of Paramēśvaram, although, as noted above, the Somāskanda image is usually associated with Narasimhavarman II.

77. The detailed architectural ornamentation in this temple, which includes a **liṅga** on a pedestal in the central cell, flanked by figures of Brahmā and Viṣṇu, indicates a later date than Mahendravarman I.

78. Srinivasan, 1958, p.132.

79. P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, 1920, p.142.

80. App IV.80.2. - see Petersen, 1989, pp.106-7, for a full translation of the verse.

81. There is evidence for similar integration amongst the **Magabrahmans** of Western India who are the descendants of the Iranian **Magu** clan, a group of religious specialists who worshipped the sun (Mithras). They entered north-western India during the Kuṣāṇa period (3rd-5th centuries CE) and merged with the Vedic **sūrya** cult, gaining acceptance as Brahmins.

82. Marr, 1985.

83. See H.Kulke in Kulke and Rothermund, *A History of India*, Routledge, London 1990, pp.142-144.

84. See Harle, 1963, p.29.

85. They are: Sakkiya-Nāyaṇār of Sangara Mangai, Śivanesar of Mayilai (Mylapore), Vayilar of Mayilai, Tirukkuripputtondar of Kāñcī, Murukka of Tiruvōrriyūr, and Kaliyar of Tiruvōrriyūr.

86. Nilakanta Sastri, 1958, p.152.

87. Clothey, 1978, p.76.

88. Ibid. p.125.

89. Ibid. p.76.

90. For example, Cam.I.100. and II.175. - see Petersen, 1989, pp.127, 159.

91. Ibid., p.274.

92. Ibid. pp.277-78.

93. For example, he is said by the tradition to have had 8000 Jains put to death and their heads impaled on railings around the city of Maturai.

94. Cam.III.309.3. - from Petersen, 1989, p.276.

95. It must be added that Śiva was not the sole deity of importance in the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom, Vaiṣṇava **bhakti** also achieving prominence in the Pāṇṭiyan area at much the same period of time, witnessed by the poetry of Nammālvār. According to Hardy, this poet belonged to the Maturai environment, and probably lived in the latter half of the 7th or early 8th century - see Hardy, 1983, pp.266-67.

96. Nilakanta Sastri, 1935, p.122 (see also p.120). The later Cōla dynasty was to make a unique contribution to the flourishing stone architecture established by the Pallavas, and temple buildings associated with their reign are found dispersed across Tamiḻnāṭu, including a number of famous **bhakti** shrines, such as Tiruvōrriyūr, Tirukkalukunram, Tiruvalur and Cidambaram, although they post-date the **bhakti** period by several centuries.

97. According to Hardy Tirumaṅkai-Ālvār lived during the second half of the 8th century - see Hardy, 1983, p.264.

98. Petersen, 1989, p.328. See also App IV.65.3. in Petersen *ibid.* pp.326-27.

99. Nilakanta Sastri, 1935, p.67.

100. See Chapter 1, p.7.

101. See Stein, 1967-68, pp.229-269, where he argues that, for several centuries prior to the establishment of Pallava power, an amicable relationship existed between the peasant agriculturalists and brahmins of the Coromandel plain, the Kāverī basin being able to support a large number of agricultural groups because wet cultivation was possible without the need for major irrigation projects. A result of this relationship, which was to become prevalent throughout the Coromandel plain from

the time of the Pallavas, was the creation of an "alliance" between the brahmins and the dominant agriculturalists, the system of social stratification associated with Brahmanism according the dominant agricultural groups a position of ritual purity next only to the brahmins, thereby maintaining their high social status against other social groups, the brahmins accomodating elements of the indigenous religion in order to forge the alliance.

102. According to the tradition Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār was born in Kāraikkāl, Appar in Tiruvāmūr, Campantar in Cīrkāli, and Cuntarar in Tirunāvalūr, all of which are encompassed by the Kāverī Delta.

103. Petersen, 1989, pp.273-74.

104. Shulman, 1980, pp.12-13.

105. Petersen, 1989, p.330.

106. Ibid. p.149.

107. Ibid. p.150.

108. According to Kandiah (1974), -ur occurs a total of 78 times and -āru 24 times in the Tēvāram. See in particular pp.140-154.

109. See Petersen, 1989, pp.159-160.

110. Ibid. p.160.

111. Ibid. p.162.

112. C.V.Narayana Ayyar, *The Origin and History of Śaivism in South India*, Madras 1936, pp.312-13.

113. Young, 1978, p.63.

114. App.V.162., from Petersen, 1989, p.258.

115. Hardy, 1983, p.141.

Divine Possession and Ecstatic Communion as Elements in the  
Development of Bhakti

An appreciable element of the religious awareness which found expression in the Tamil **bhakti** hymns is the ecstatic nature of the encounter with the divine. The zeal and passion of the **bhaktas**' response to Śiva, and the overpowering effect of God's love and grace upon them, which they frequently express in terms of madness and possession, accompanied by physical symptoms such as shaking and falling down, differentiate southern **bhakti** from the earlier Brahmanical understanding of the term, where it implied loyalty towards and intellectual concentration upon the deity (see above pp.2-3). Their hymns also serve to communicate their personal experience of the divine to a wider community of devotees, who thereby participate in the spiritual transformation of the poets, further distinguishing Tamil **bhakti** from the religious attitude expressed in Brahmanical texts which make use of the concept, including the Bhagavad Gītā, in which the attainment of salvation was deemed an essentially individual affair<sup>1</sup>. The absence of ecstatic and mediative features from the early northern conception of **bhakti** indicates that the factors which gave rise to the passionate and communal nature of southern **bhakti** did not derive from the Brahmanical tradition but from another source, and suggests a background in archaic "folk" religion in which divine possession and ecstatic communion formed an integral part of religious experience.

Ecstatic states of consciousness are found amongst inspired



religions universally, but when the ecstatic state is induced by certain behavioural techniques, and combined with the abilities of prophecy, divination and healing, the phenomenon is usually termed shamanism and the inspired individual is known as a shaman<sup>2</sup>. The ecstatic experience may involve mystical flights to the sky or descents to the underworld<sup>3</sup>, but it is also thought to result from the possession of an individual, male or female, by a supernatural agent. The shamanic priest enters into direct communion with a spirit or deity by going into a trance state, induced by rhythmic music, singing and dancing, and indicated physically by such phenomena as trembling, salivating and falling down. It is not an individual concern, but involves a whole community of people, who communicate with the spiritual realm through the person of the inspired priest. As the receptacle through which the spirit speaks, the shaman is able to prophesy the future, diagnose the cause of sickness and misfortune in others, and prescribe the correct remedy.

Although the **bhaktas** were not shaman<sup>s</sup>, both the intensity and directness of their intuition of the deity, and the mediative nature of their hymns, recall the inspired behaviour of the shamanic priest and his ascribed role as intercessor between the supernatural world and the realm of man. However, although shamanic cults exist today throughout tribal India, and must have their roots in an ancient Pan-Indian form of inspired religion of non-Āryan origin, modern ethnographic evidence has shown that there is a wide variation in both the method and goals involved in the ecstatic experience<sup>4</sup>. They are conditional upon the belief system of the particular cultural group within which they operate - as I.M. Lewis states in his study of ecstatic religion, "*mystical experience...is grounded in and must relate to the social environment in which it is achieved*"<sup>5</sup>. The ecstatic nature of Tamil **bhakti**, therefore, whilst it displays a number of features which are common to inspired religions universally, must also be deemed to

be dependent upon the religious concepts and values of the indigenous Tamil tradition within which it arose. With reference to the classical Tamil literature this chapter will seek to show that ecstatic and mediative features which derived from within the indigenous religious tradition developed and found a new form of expression in the hymns of the **bhakti** poets, resulting in the transformation of Brahmanical **bhakti**, and the first literary expression of ecstatic mystical consciousness within the Hindu tradition.

### *Shamanic Features in the Classical Literature*

The religion of the ancient Tamils, as it is depicted in the Caṅkam literature, manifests a number of features which are characteristic of shamanic practices and possession states. There are several references in the Caṅkam texts to certain individuals, both male and female, connected with possession and divination. The male priest involved in the worship of Murukaṇ was called a **vēlan** "he who (holds) the spear", a term applied to Murukaṇ himself, indicating the intimacy of their relationship. Through the performance of an ecstatic dance, the **veriyāṭu** or "dance of wild frenzy", the priest was able to enter a trance and become possessed by the deity. He was then able to divine the cause of various diseases and misfortunes through consultation of an oracle of **kaḷaṅku** (molucca) beans, and prescribe the correct remedy, usually some form of sacrifice to the God:

*"He (the vēlan) cuts the young ram and smears blood on the forehead of the young girl and then offers as sacrifice to the deity the many-coloured rice balls."*

Kuṛun.362:2-4<sup>6</sup>

The references to female "priestesses" are less frequent but they make it clear that a special type of elderly woman could also become possessed, and thereby divine the cause of illness and suffering in others through consultation of various oracles:

*"The women of ancient wisdom (mutu vāy) who are capable of telling lies spread the portions of various cereals and divining said, 'this distress has been caused by Murukan\_.'"*

Akan.98:6-10<sup>7</sup>

The ritualistic dance which the vēlan performed to induce the trance of possession, the veriyāṭu, took place on the kōṭṭam or "sacred place", which could be set up almost anywhere, including a house, a river delta, a market place, the threshing-ground (kaḷam), or in the vicinity of a kaṭampu tree<sup>8</sup>. The chosen site was specially prepared in advance of the vēlan's dance - according to Aiṅkurunūru (245, 248, 249) and Narriṇai (268), for example, the dance takes place on the threshing-ground which has first been covered in fresh sand and decorated with red kāntaḷ flowers<sup>9</sup>, further suggesting that the site was ritually prescribed - as it was observed in the previous chapter, it was the enclosure of such a spot which Clothey believes may have been the forerunner to the indigenous Tamil temple (see above p.54).

The veriyāṭu, however, was not solely a male concern, and women were also able to perform it. In Maturaikkāñci (610) the dance is mentioned in connection with the priestess, here called the cālīni, and, in Canto 12 of the Cilappatikāram, a woman of the Maravar tribe performs the veriyāṭu in order to mediate the wishes of the goddess to the assembled group<sup>10</sup>. It was also performed by young, unmarried women as a form of ecstatic worship to Murukan, although in these instances there are no associated divinatory or mediative features:

*"the large market-place where festivals never cease, which was crowded with girls (dancing) the veriyāṭu of Cevvēl!"*  
Paṭṭ.154-8<sup>11</sup>

*"the threshing-ground (kaḷam) where girls dance who are experiencing possession by Neṭuvēl." Kuṛi.174f<sup>12</sup>*

*"on all the streets (young women) get into a frenzy,  
dance, sing and make a loud noise" Mat.615f<sup>13</sup>*

Various other forms of dance are mentioned in a considerable number of poems, and several of these are associated with Murukan, either directly, or by implication through their setting in the **kurīñci** landscape of the hills. They include the **kuravai**, a dance, which, like the **veriyāṭu**, also displays features of an ecstatic nature such as frenzy, possession and the imbibing of intoxicating liquor:

*"...when you have seen the kuravai in the court-yard with the  
vēñkai tree, drinking the liquor that matured in the bent bamboo  
on the lofty hills..." Naṛr.276, 7-10<sup>14</sup>*

*"we are holding hands and joyfully dance the kuravai to please  
the god (Murukan) who lives on the mountains" Kali.39, 26-9<sup>15</sup>*

The performance of these dances is associated with music, including the beating of drums, which is both symbolic of the rhythm of the universe and, as Eliade has shown, forms an important part in the induction of trance in shamanic ceremonies universally<sup>16</sup>. In the Paṭṭinappālai, for example, there are references to several musical instruments in connection with the **veriyāṭu**, including two different kinds of drum<sup>17</sup>, and in the Malaipaṭukātam the beating of a drum is mentioned in association with the **kuravai** dance:

*"flutes are piping, the lute is resounding, and the muḷava  
and muracu drums are reverberating." Paṭṭ.156<sup>18</sup>*

*"...the kuravai that is danced high up on the sky-touching  
mountains by the hillmen and their women, who have drunk  
liquor,.. while the small drum (covered with) deerskin  
resounds..." Mal.320-22<sup>19</sup>*

According to Lewis, it is an almost universal fact that induction into the shamanistic career follows some form of traumatic experience or illness<sup>20</sup>, often with no trance-like characteristics, although it is only in the mastering of the spirits *"in a controlling fashion"* that an



individual can be termed a shaman<sup>21</sup>. Both disease and possession were closely connected in the early Tamil consciousness, and it is a common theme throughout the Caṅkam corpus that illness was caused by the possession of an individual by Murukaṇ. In *akam*, a particular genre developed where the *vēlaṇ* was called to diagnose the cause of an illness in the unmarried heroine, and mistakes her undisclosed love for the hero as possession by the deity:

*"My friend! When my mother, on account of my "illness" arranges for the vēlaṇ to come, will that vēlaṇ be able to find out about my affair with the lord of the fragrant country, when he is in the frenzy of his dance of possession?"*

Akan.241<sup>22</sup>

The principal ecstatic features of Murukaṇ's worship are recounted in Chapter Five of the Tirumurukāruppaṭai, which describes the religious ritual of the people of the hills, who were associated with Murukaṇ from the early classical period (see above pp.33-34). Although this text belongs to the end of the Caṅkam period the description is suggestive of a much earlier practice which, possibly as a result of the increased concern with religious expression in Tamil literature by the 6th C, was more extensively portrayed in the TMP. It also suggests that, in a text exclusively dedicated to Murukaṇ, there was a wish by the poet to portray the entire breadth of religious experience involved in the deity's worship. In this chapter the *vēlaṇ* invokes Murukaṇ and becomes possessed by him amidst a whole community of men and women, the "*jungle tribes*", who are depicted dancing, drinking and singing in their mountain village "*to the beat of small hillside drums*". The *vēlaṇ* then proceeds to imitate Murukaṇ by dancing his dance, wearing his robes and insignia, and carrying his musical instruments and his spear (*vēl*). As though to emphasise the identification of the *vēlaṇ* with Murukaṇ the text abounds in images of redness, the colour of the deity, until finally the

priest becomes one with him. The text is replete with shamanistic features of possession and ecstatic behaviour, and, although it contains no descriptions of divination or healing, the entire context of the poem suggests that they were a component part of the ceremony. In Ramanujan's English version of the poem he directly translates the term vēlan as "shaman":

*" ...the shaman  
is the Red One himself,  
is in red robes;  
young leaf of the red-trunk asoka  
flutters in his ears;  
He wears a coat of mail  
a warrior band on his ankle,  
a wreath of scarlet ixora;  
has a flute,  
a horn,  
several small instruments  
of music;  
for vehicles  
he has a ram,  
a peacock;  
a faultless rooster  
on his banner..."*

TMP<sup>23</sup>

There are several instances in the Caṅkam texts where the priests and priestesses involved in the propitiation of Murukan are referred to by the epithet mutu vāy or "ancient wisdom"<sup>24</sup>. The epithet derives from mutu "old, ancient" and vāy, literally "mouth", but also "word of mouth", which, according to Kailasapathy, by a process of semantic extension, means "wisdom"<sup>25</sup>. For example:

*"the vēlan of ancient wisdom (mutu vāy) who was called in by mother said this: "This disease has been caused by the will of the deity. I know a cure for it."*

Akan.388:19-21

Kuṇ.282:5-6<sup>26</sup>

*"If Lord Murukan who with his renowned broad hands destroyed those who would not heed his behests, is*

*placated, this girl's suffering will be remedied.' The woman of ancient wisdom (mutu vāy) said this as truth. And so, at midnight, the sacrificial floor was well-prepared and to the loud singing in the temple, sacrifice was offered; shapely red-millet mixed with blood was sprayed and Murukan was invoked."*

Akan.22:5-11<sup>27</sup>

In these passages the term **mutu vāy** is used to signify someone associated with possession and prophecy. However, the term is also applied to certain of the bardic poets in the Caṅkam corpus - in Puṛan.(49:7), for example, a bard is described as "*possessing ancient wisdom (mutu vāy)*"<sup>28</sup>. Kailasapathy has argued that the fact that the epithet is applied both to individuals who become possessed by the deity and practice divination, as well as certain of the bardic poets means that "*ipso facto the poets were considered possessed and prophetic*"<sup>29</sup>. Although there is no direct evidence in the classical literature that the bards entered trance-states or became possessed by a deity, the epithet suggests that they were considered the conveyors of an ancient and indestructible truth, and this is illustrated by a number of other epithets, which further recall the high esteem in which the **pulavars** were held (see above pp.21-22): the poet's intellect is spotless (Puṛan.126:11); he knows the minds of men (Poru.57); he has the wisdom and subtle intellect to choose the most beautiful words (Puṛan.235:13); the words of the poet are high and lofty (Puṛan.394:5); his words are constantly truthful (Puṛan.221:10)<sup>30</sup>. These epithets indicate the high value placed upon the words of the poet by the Tamil tradition and further suggest that there was a second level at which inspired truth could be mediated in Tamil awareness - that the poetry itself was deemed a medium of contact between a higher level of knowledge and mankind. The intimate connection between the **vēlan** and the priestesses and Murukan, taken together with the evidence already examined for the implicit religious character of the **pulavars** and their association with

the Murukan cult, also suggests that the source of both shamanic and poetic inspiration was considered to be the indigenous deity - according to Kailasapathy, "*poets (the Tamil bards) have always been associated with profound learning and wisdom, which was originally largely religious in character, and connected with the cult of Murukan*"<sup>31</sup>.

Features of ecstatic worship, possession and mediation can be attributed to inspired religions universally, but what makes the Tamil situation unique in the history of Indian religion is that these features found literary expression within the framework of a highly sophisticated cultural system. In the majority of instances in the Caṅkam literature ecstatic worship and divine communion are closely associated with the cult of Murukan. His worship is one of interaction and participation, a deity to be experienced through the senses and responded to directly, and the belief that he could possess people and act within the world appears to be the result of the general this-worldliness and feeling of divine immanence which the Caṅkam literature displays. The evidence also suggests that there was an implicit identification between certain bards and possession and prophecy, closely associated with the cult of Murukan, and that the poetry itself was the medium whereby knowledge of a higher reality was transmitted from the poet to an audience, and from one generation to another.

#### *Ecstatic consciousness in the bhakti hymns*

The emotionalism which the **bhakti** hymns display reflects many of the ecstatic features of the earlier Caṅkam religious awareness, including possession, frenzy and dance, although, in the **bhakti** hymns, there is a shift from the objective description of ecstatic experience and worship, such as that depicted in the



Tirumurukārruppaṭai, to the **bhakta's** subjective experience of God. Possession is no longer seen from the onlooker's point of view but is described personally, happening to the poet, and the hymns reflect the intensity of the experience.

The ecstatic experience of **bhakti** was one of being overpowered, enslaved or entered into by Śiva, a transforming, internal experience which brought about a new form of mystical consciousness. In the Arputattiruvantāti Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃ refers to Śiva as he "*who possesses me*"<sup>32</sup>, and he "*who possesses my heart/who is in my heart*"<sup>33</sup>. Appar states that "*Śiva penetrates the devotee's mind and is ever united with him*"<sup>34</sup>, and that "*His holy feet are in my eyes and in my heart*"<sup>35</sup>, indicating that God has entered into him and become a part of him, and he further declares to the devotees at Cidambaram "...*have we not been born to serve him, to be possessed by the dancer of Tillai's Ampalam hall...*"<sup>36</sup>. Campantar describes God as "*the thief who stole my heart*"<sup>37</sup>, because he takes possession of it without the mystic even being aware of it, and Cuntarar exclaims that "*Śiva has penetrated his heart and stays united with him*"<sup>38</sup>. In the Tiruvācakam of Māṇikkavācakar there is the clearest expression of how God enters into and possesses the devotee:

*"He put an end  
to the turbulent impurity  
which comes like waves of the sea,  
entered and filled my body and soul  
without leaving any space empty.  
Our God who wears the light-giving lustrous moon,  
who dwells in holy Perunturai,  
whose crown is his spreaded matted locks-  
O what a trick He played."*

Tiru.34:6<sup>39</sup>

The subjective result of Śiva's taking possession of the devotee and, through the bestowal of grace, liberating him from **karma** and **samsāra**, is frequently described as madness. Appar describes himself

as "... *having gone mad, I babble like a fool*"<sup>40</sup>, and tells of how "*Śiva reveals release to his devotees who have become madmen (pittan)*"<sup>41</sup>, whilst Campantar refers to Śiva's devotees as "*madmen who madly parade about*"<sup>42</sup>. In the Tiruvācakam there are several passages which describe how Śiva has filled Māṇikkavācakar with madness and intoxicated him, melting his mind. In Tiru.47:6, for example, he relates how Śiva "*filled me with madness, cut off my rebirth, came and made my mind indescribably intoxicated*"<sup>43</sup>, and in Tiru.38:7 he directly associates his possession with divine grace:

*"Our Lord  
On that day when you looked at me  
You took possession of me  
in grace you entered me  
And out of love melted my mind"*  
Tiru.38:7<sup>44</sup>

The effects of God's love upon his devotees are also described in terms drawn from the classical **akam** love poetry, the **bhaktas** employing the voices of female characters from this genre in order to impart their own spiritual experience. Although the role of the feminine in **bhakti** will be examined in more detail in the following chapter, a few quotations are pertinent here as they describe the madness of the divine encounter from the standpoint of the female characters who see the effect of Śiva's love on the heroine. In these instances the depiction of the spiritual experience of **bhakti** appears to be almost a form of infatuation. Appar, for example, employs the voices of the foster-mother and mother to impart the impact of God's love upon him. As the foster-mother he describes the heroine who has fallen madly in love with the deity: "*she started to speak incoherently; she utters the name of her lover in solitude; and has become mad in her love, having seen the Lord coming along in procession*"<sup>45</sup>; and as the mother wondering what has overcome her daughter he says: "*How is it that my daughter has gone mad, having seen the Lord and fallen*

*in love with Him*"<sup>46</sup>.

The "madness" of the possessed state is associated with various forms of ecstatic behaviour and other physical characteristics connected with the induction of trance, including dance, shaking, intoxication, falling down, and hair standing on end, recalling the frenzied behaviour of the *vēlaṇ* and the young female worshippers of *Murukaṇ*. Dance in particular is a recurrent motif - Campantar speaks of devotees dancing in rapture to the recitation of hymns<sup>47</sup>, and of *"devotees who know how to weep, to dance and sing and rise, and again fall at the father's feet"*<sup>48</sup>, and Cuntarar promises *"divine enjoyment"* to those who chant hymns set to music and dance rhythmically for several days<sup>49</sup>. In a hymn by Appar at the temple of *Kuraṅkāṭuturai* he invites fellow worshippers to join him in praising Śiva: *"O devotees who have joined <sup>our</sup> are group out of love, dance, weep, worship him, sing his feet..."*<sup>50</sup>. Māṇikkavācakar mentions dance in association with the madness that Śiva induces in him on eight occasions in the *Tiruvācakam*<sup>51</sup>, and in *Tiru.27* he vividly depicts the perturbing effects of the deity upon his behaviour:

*"With mind melting, melting  
growing more and more tender  
standing, sitting, lying, rising,  
laughing, weeping, serving, praising -  
when shall I dancing do all these things?  
With hair bristling, bristling,  
when am I going to gaze upon His holy form,  
which gleams like the sunset  
and enter (union) with Him?  
When shall I be united with my uncut Gem?"*  
Tiru.27:7-8<sup>52</sup>

There are few specific references to musical instruments in the *bhakti* hymns but they do occur. In a hymn by Campantar to Śiva at *Mutukunram*, for instance, he mentions women dancing in praise of Śiva on festival days *"to the sound of song and drum"*<sup>53</sup>, and, in another hymn, in which the poet speaks with the voice of a woman, he

mentions the **mulavam** drum and the lute, which were also played in association with the **veriyāṭu** (see above p.100). In the context of this hymn, however, the beating of the drum has a more aesthetic than ecstatic character, suggestive of the harmony of life in Śiva's presence: "*He (Śiva) stayed, playing the lute, singing songs to the beat of the mulavam and montai drums*"<sup>54</sup>.

Although it is in the hymns of the poets themselves that there is the clearest indication of the effects of the mystical encounter with the deity, the traditions surrounding the **bhakti** poets, as recorded in the Periya Purāṇam, make it clear that their induction into the spiritual career was closely associated with ideas of suffering and affliction, which, as we have seen, were frequently interpreted as divine possession in the early classical period. Each of the **bhaktas** underwent a conversion experience which involved some form of mystical encounter or afflicting illness, resulting in the transformation of their spiritual consciousness. Appar, for example, who is traditionally held to have been a Jain monk before his conversion to Śaivism, is said to have had a stomach ailment which proved incurable by Jain remedies, and his health was only restored when he forsook Jainism and became a devotee of Śiva. Cuntarar underwent an initial conversion experience which totally transformed his life whilst attending a wedding ceremony at the Aruṭṭurai temple in Veṇṇeynallūr, where he was approached by an old man who declared him to be his bonded slave. Cuntarar called him **pittan** (madman), following which the old man disappeared into the inner shrine leaving a valid deed of sale, at which Cuntarar declared himself Śiva's everlasting slave. However, Cuntarar also had to undergo a second conversion following the breaking of his vow to Śiva never to leave Caṅkili, his wife at Tiruvorriyūr. He was struck down with blindness by Śiva, and his affliction was only relieved in stages at various shrines on his return to Tiruvārūr, as he re-established his



relationship with the deity, a legend for which there is corroborative evidence in his own hymns (see above pp.28-29).

### *Divine communion*

**Bhakti** involves the relationship between an individual and God, but it is also characterised by the communal nature of the spiritual experience - as Ramanujan has observed, the poets "*thrive on contagion, communion in community, being in touch with each other*"<sup>55</sup>. Many of the hymns are set to **paṇ**, ancient Tamil musical modes, and, although it has been suggested that they may have been allocated by Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi<sup>56</sup>, who arranged the the Tēvāram according to **paṇ**, there are references in the hymns themselves which indicate that they were intended for congregational singing. Campantar states in a number of his hymns that they are meant to be sung to **paṇ**<sup>57</sup>, and describes how "*Devotees in a group, worship Śiva, offering picked flowers and garlands and sing hymns in praise of Him*"<sup>58</sup>, and devotees who "*congregate and sing hymns to music in worship while brahmans chant the Vedas*"<sup>59</sup>. There is also evidence in the hymns that song as a form of religious expression, particularly involving women, was an established and familiar practice in the **bhakti** period. There are several instances in the hymns of Campantar in which he depicts female devotees praising Śiva in song, recalling the active participation of women in the worship of Murukaṇ. For example:

*"Aiyāru's Lord is the kind god  
who delights in listening  
when women with melodious voices,  
coral-red lips, countless virtues,  
and eyes sharper than spears,  
sing his glory  
in vaṇṇam<sup>60</sup> songs and hymns of praise."  
Cam.II.142.4<sup>61</sup>*

Hymns 7-19 of the Tiruvācakam, commonly known as the "pestle

songs", are also meant to be sung, mostly by women whilst performing household tasks, or in accompaniment to games. They continue a genre found in the Caṅkam literature called *vaḷḷaippaṭṭu* or *ulakkaipāṭṭu* - songs in praise of a hero sung by women when husking grain<sup>62</sup>. The following example from the Tiruvācakam is not only meant to be sung by women but also conveys the ecstatic experience of the deity through their voices:

*"While our pearl-adorned breasts rise and fall as we lift the  
pestle,  
While beetles swarm in our hair,  
While our minds move with Śiva,  
While teardrops brim in our fish-shaped eyes,  
While we dance madly with our Lord,  
While others go from birth to birth,  
While the father is full of mercy,  
Let us, dancing, pound the gold dust."*

Tiru.9:37-40<sup>63</sup>

Māṇikkavācakar occasionally refers to ordinary men and women in disparaging tones when they fail to understand the demented behaviour which Śiva induces in him, describing them as "*men of the world*" (Tiru.26:4<sup>64</sup>) and "*people on earth*" (Tiru.11:5<sup>65</sup>), his behaviour provoking puzzlement and wonder in those around him (Tiru.3:154<sup>66</sup>). However, his hymns also illustrate the importance of the wider community of devotees to him, indicating the high value he placed upon life in this world, and this paradoxical attitude suggests that his belittlement of those around him resulted from an initially bewildering encounter with Śiva which developed into a more mature understanding of divinity. In the following hymn in praise of Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara, for example, he asks the deity that, by his grace, he may be allowed to continue to live amongst his devotees as the Goddess abides in Śiva:

*"The Mistress dwells in the midst of You.  
You dwell in the midst of Her.  
If both of You dwell in the midst of me, Your servant,*

*exercise Your grace  
so that I may dwell in the midst of Your devotees."*  
Tiru.21:1<sup>67</sup>

The very structure of the **bhakti** hymns themselves seems to imply their communal nature. Written in Tamil, the language of the mass of the population, the hymns take the form of **patikams** (see above p.12), which, although they represent a style of verse new to Tamil literature, and display a number of new prosodic principles, also combine them with the conventions and essential metrical patterns of the earlier Tamil literature<sup>68</sup>. In many instances they are followed by a **phalaśruti**, literally "fruits of hearing", a poetic device in the form of a signature verse, which always addresses an audience of devotees<sup>69</sup>. The **phalaśruti** derives from the Sanskritic literary tradition, and it was customarily appended to Sanskrit manuscripts. In **bhakti** it is employed to relate the spiritual benefits a devotee may attain by hearing or reciting the preceding verses. For example: "*There is no distress for those who chant the ten verses on Namaccivāya*" (App.Tev.11)<sup>70</sup>; "*Those who chant the ten verses on Irāmēccuram will think of the Lord with melting heart*" (App.Tev.61)<sup>71</sup>; "*This is my oath that those who chant this hymn will not be reborn but will live in the upper world*" (Cam.Tev.376)<sup>72</sup>; "*Those who are able to recite the ten verses clearly or listen to them will obtain heavenly enjoyment.*" (Cam.Tev.11,105,117)<sup>73</sup>. The **phalaśruti** is a relatively mechanistic addition to Sanskrit works, but, in the **bhakti** hymns, the fact that it is written in Tamil, and follows a verse form, which, whilst in many aspects new to Tamil literature, in regard to both poetic convention and metre derives from the Tamil tradition, suggests that the **phalaśruti** cannot have been applied in an unconsidered manner by the **bhaktas** but must have served a particular purpose. Whilst it is possible that they employed it to bestow their hymns with a higher status by complying with the conventions of

classical Sanskrit verse, the fact that they make no other concessions to Sanskrit literary technique suggests that it was utilised by the poets to directly relate the hymns to an audience, actively encouraging participation in the experience of Śiva, and enhancing the overall sense of communion in the hymns.

The emphasis on congregational worship is a striking feature of Tamil **bhakti**, and indicates that the liberating experience was not meant for the individual poet alone but for a community of devotees. It not only distinguishes southern **bhakti** from the religious attitude expressed in the Upaniṣadic texts but from the more popular type of worship laid down in the Purāṇas in the Gupta period, which, whilst it may involve a number of people, was primarily a personal rather than a communal activity. The references to fellow devotees are frequently associated with ecstatic worship, the **bhaktas** calling on the devotees to join them and participate in Śiva through dance, weeping, and recitation, promising the reward of spiritual grace to those who do so. The active participation of the Śaiva community in **bhakti** is reminiscent of the earlier Tamil community spirit surrounding the worship of Murukaṇ, and suggests that the communal nature of **bhakti** developed out of an established Tamil religious practice.

At one level, therefore, the result of the **bhaktas'** surrender to God's love and grace is a mystical apprehension of such an overwhelming nature that they conceive of themselves as possessed by the deity. It has a number of parallels with the earlier worship of Murukaṇ, which, as we have seen, was partly a form of indigenous South Indian shamanism, although in the hymns the experience of ecstatic consciousness is described from the subject's rather than the onlooker's point-of-view. Throughout the hymns features which were typical of Murukaṇ's worship, such as song, dance and music, recur, and the hysterical or "mad" behaviour associated with the possessed-



state recalls the frenzied behaviour of the **vēlan** as he performed the **veriyātu** and entered the trance-state, and descriptions of the enthusiastic worship of **Murukan** by young unmarried women. However, whilst there is evidence in a small minority of hymns that ecstatic behaviour may have been enacted in order to bring about the possessed-state (eg Cam.Tev.I.35.3, App.Tev.V.177.8.- above p.107), in the majority of the hymns, in particular those of **Māṇikkavācakar**, the physical manifestations which the poets exhibit do not appear to be the cause of their altered state of consciousness but the direct result of Śiva's grace. Unlike the shaman, the **bhaktas** do not master Śiva, and they cannot become possessed by design. They are almost entirely dependent for their experience upon the will of the deity, and this leads to their intense sorrow in separation from Śiva - an integral part of their experience of the deity is in fact one of absence (below Chp.5).

As Tamil poets they were also heir to an indigenous tradition that ascribed certain of the earlier bards with a sacred character as the mediators of ancient and divinely inspired truths. Their words were especially significant because they were the medium through which the most ancient wisdom of the Tamil was transmitted from the poet to an audience and from one generation to another. However, whilst the evidence suggests that there was an association between the bards and the **Murukan** cult, there is no direct documentation in the **Caṅkam** literature that the bards themselves entered into a personal relationship with the deity, and even the **Tirumurukāṟruppaṭai**, whilst it is an exclusively religious text intended for an audience, does not represent a truly personal understanding of Ultimate Truth on the part of the poet. The ecstatic relationship of **bhakti** comes nearer to the intimate and personal relationship between the **vēlan** and **Murukan**, although the **bhaktas** fully transformed the medium of divine communication from the person of the shaman to their hymns. They

were thereby able to communicate their direct experiential knowledge of the divine to the wider Śaiva community, and were further aware that the cause of misfortune and suffering in others, and themselves, was separation from Ultimate Reality in the form of a loving and gracious God. Through the medium of their hymns they sought to inspire devotion to Śiva in their fellow men with words which had the power of spiritual transformation, striving to "cure" or "heal" their audience from the ills of **samsāric** existence.

The ecstatic and communal nature of Tamil **bhakti** is incongruous with Brahmanical ideology, and reflects the world-view of the ancient Tamils, which perceived the divine as immanent in the phenomenal world, and allowed certain members of Tamil society to enter into direct communication with the supernatural realm, through the practice of "shamanic" techniques, on behalf of the wider community. However, this was not the only way in which the early Tamils expressed their religiosity, and nor is it the only manner in which the **bhaktas** express their relationship with Śiva. It does not represent the fulfilment of their spiritual experience but, rather, seems to indicate the initial transformation of their spiritual consciousness from the worldly to the divine plane. As we shall see in the following chapter the **bhaktas'** encounter with divinity had to progress through various stages in order to result in a more complete understanding of divine totality.

1. For example, in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad we find, "...his desires fulfilled, (A man is then) absolute, alone" (Śv.Up.I:11, trans. by Zaehner, 1966, p.205); and in the Bhagavad Gītā, "...Himself (ātmanā) contented in self alone, Then is he called a man of steady wisdom..." (Bh.G.II:55, Zaehner ibid. p.259).

2. The word shaman comes through Russian from the Central Asian Tungus word *šaman*, literally "one who is excited, raised or moved" - see Mircea Eliade "Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy" trans. W.R.Trask, London, 1964, pp.3-4, and I.M.Lewis "Ecstatic Religion: an anthropological study of possession and shamanism" Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971, pp.49-50.

3. Mircea Eliade, in his historical analysis of the development of shamanism (1964, p.5), emphasises the spiritual journeys during which the soul is believed to leave the body, and does not consider spirit possession an essential characteristic of shamanism. However, I.M.Lewis, in his sociological analysis of the phenomenon (1971, pp.50-51), states that shamanism and spirit possession regularly occur together, even amongst the classical Arctic Tungus, and that Eliade's position is therefore "untenable".

4. There is, for example, an almost complete absence of mystical flight in shamanic cults of South India. For instance, whilst the shamanic priest in the Saora tribe of Orissa in Middle India makes journeys in dreams to the Land of the Dead, amongst the Nayar of the South there is little or no concept of a land of the dead and shamanic practices are oriented almost entirely towards the living, a fact which Kathleen Gough argues is due to "*a general this-worldly attitude among traditional Nayars*" (1959, p.247). The aims of the shamanic trance are also culturally defined - amongst the Todas of the Nilgiri hills the shaman becomes possessed by a god and is consulted regarding all misfortunes and illness, but in particular over problems with buffalo which are the mainstay of the Toda economy, and therefore of paramount importance to the survival of the society itself. According to Rex Jones the differences in ecstatic experience amongst shamanic cults in modern India are the result of differences in the eschatological beliefs of the particular culture, although these are themselves dependent upon the entire world-view of the culture within which they operate. See Rex Jones, "Shamanism in South Asia", *History of Religion* 7, pp.330-347, citing the evidence of W.H.R.Rivers, *The Todas*, Macmillan and Co., New York 1906, pp.249f; Verrier Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe*, Oxford University Press 1955, on the Saora tribe; and Kathleen Gough, "Cults of the Dead among the Nayars", in Milton Singer, ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, Philadelphia, American Folklore Society 1959.

5. Lewis, 1971, p.16.

6. Kailasapathy, 1968, p.64.

7. Ibid. p.62.

8. Clothey, 1978, p.27 and n.17 p.208, citing M.K.Thangavelu, 1963, pp.70-73 - his evidence is based on references in Akan.282:17-18; 353:3-7; Kurun.264:1-6; Narr.268:7-10; Aink.245, 248, 249. See also Hardy, 1983, pp.136, 139.

9. Clothey *ibid.* p.27 and n.17, p.208, and Hardy *ibid.* p.139.

10. See Hardy *ibid.* p.139, n.84; and Yocum, 1973, p.11, and 1982, p.191.

11. Hardy *ibid.* p.138.

12. *Ibid.* p.139.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.* p.618.

15. *Ibid.*

16. See Eliade, 1964, p.168.

17. That the Tamils considered the drum itself to be imbued with sacred power is indicated by a number of allusions in the texts. According to Puran.238 if a **muracu** drum broke it was considered a bad omen, and Puran.26 relates how, in war, a victorious king would take his enemies **muracu** drum by which act he received the right to his kingdom (Puran.70). This drum was made of the skin of a bull vanquished by a rival in a bullfight (Puran.288), the wood taken from an enemies tutelary tree, and, in many ways, it resembles the drums used by Siberian shamans, which are also made of wood from particular trees and covered with special skin - see Hart, 1975, p.16, citing the evidence of N.Subrahmanian, *Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index*, Madras 1966, p.694.

In contemporary India, drums continue to be used in village rituals, and many of them are covered in buffalo hide - Alf Hiltebeitel, "Rāma and Gilgamesh: the sacrifices of the water buffalo and the bull of heaven", *History of Religion* 19, 1979-80, pp.187-223, p.221.

18. Hardy, 1983, p.139.

19. *Ibid.* p.618.

20. See Lewis, 1971, p.45 and p.180.

21. *Ibid.* p.56 and p.64. Eliade also describes the shaman as the "*great master of ecstasy*" who specialises in trance - 1964, pp.3-4.

22. Hardy, 1983, p.138.

23. Ramanujan, 1981, pp.113-114.



24. On one occasion it is applied to a lizard, a creature commonly held to be connected with divination in India:

*"Should a lizard with an old, wise mouth (mutu vāy), seated on a hero-stone, screech even a little out of hunger, so even a powerful king riding on a well-jewelled elephant will not proceed further on the journey, in the face of the portent and will turn back."* Akan.387:15-19 (Kailasapathy, 1968, p.62)

25. Ibid. p.61.

26. Ibid. p.62.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid. p.61 and p.112.

29. Ibid. p.65.

30. All the quotations are from Kailasapathy ibid. p.61.

31. Ibid. p.113.

32. ATAnt 92 - from Hardy, 1983, p.307.

33. ATAnt 6 - ibid.

34. App.Tev.202:1 - from Kandiah, 1974, p.217.

35. App.Tev. 97:5 - ibid.

36. App.IV.81.5.- Petersen, 1989, p.255.

37. This is a refrain in Cam.I.1.1. - see Petersen ibid., p.246. The hero in **akam** is often referred to as a thief because he steals the heart of the heroine.

38. Cun.Tev.45:4 - from Kandiah, 1974, p.217.

39. Yocum, 1982, p.81.

40. App.IV.79.4. - from Petersen, 1989, p.224.

41. App.Tev.810 - from Yocum, 1982, p.187.

42. Cam.II.105.6 - ibid.

43. Yocum, "Māṇikkavācakar's Image of Śiva", *History of Religion* 16, 1976-77, pp.20-41, p.27.

44. Yocum, 1982, p.142.

45. App 120:8 - from Kandiah, 1974, p.247.
46. App 120:7 - *ibid.*
47. For example Cam.Tev.183:6, 65:10, 169:2 - see *ibid.* p.174.
48. Cam.I.35.3. - Petersen, 1989, pp.257-58.
49. Cun.Tev.30:10 - Kandiah, 1974, p.174.
50. App.V.177.8 - Petersen, 1989, p258.
51. Tiru.4:61-62; 5:14,95,100; 7:15; 9:10; 15:4; 27:8 - see Yocum, 1982, p.188.
52. *Ibid.* p.169. See also Tiru.3:150-156, pp.180-181.
53. Cam.I.12.7. - Petersen, 1989, pp183-84.
54. Cam I.73.8. - *ibid.* pp.104-105.
55. Ramanujan, 1981, p.146.
56. Marr, 1985, p.22.
57. For example Cam.Tev.32, 103, 159, 181, 360 - see Marr *ibid.*, p.22.
58. Cam.Tev.351.6 - Kandiah, 1974, p.174.
59. Cam.Tev.38.6 - *ibid.*
60. **Vaṇṇam** is a type of musical composition with complex rhythmic dimensions - see Petersen, 1989, pp.212-213.
61. *Ibid.*
62. See Kailasapathy, 1968, p.234, and Yocum, 1982, p.57 - an example of a secular "pestle song" in the classical literature is Kuṛun.89 in which a girl sings of her lover as she pounds paddy.
63. Yocum, 1973, p.12.
64. Yocum, 1982, p.92.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.* p.181.
67. Yocum, "The Goddess in a Tamil Śaiva Devotional Text, Māṇikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam*", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLV/I, Supplement, March 1977, pp.369-388, p.382.

68. See Petersen, 1989, p.23. The older metres of **venpā**, **akaval**, and **kali** get longer, and the new metre is called **viruttam**.

69. See Cutler, "The Devotees Experience of the Sacred Tamil Hymns", *History of Religion* 24, 1984-85, pp.91-112, in particular pp.94-96, and Petersen, 1989, p.22, n.10.

70. Kandiah, 1974, p.360.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid. p.364.

73. Ibid. p.398.

### The Role of the Sacred Feminine in **Bhakti**

There is one further important aspect of **bhakti** which reflects the cultural and religious values of the indigenous tradition within which the **bhakti** movement arose, and that is the role of the sacred feminine. The **bhakti** hymns reveal a positive attitude to the feminine which is in sharp contrast to Buddhist and Jain attitudes - for these religions the world of **samsāra**, itself a feminine symbol, was either deemed to be full of temptations that led away from the goal of liberation, temptations which themselves were perceived as female, including feminine sexuality, regarded as a threat to spiritual progression, or, in sects which affirmed the feminine and allowed women access to the spiritual path, their sexuality was denied<sup>1</sup>. However, in **bhakti**, in which the state of liberation is an immediate experience, the world is not an impediment to spiritual progression but the physical manifestation of the deity's domain, and the **bhaktas** praise Śiva by exalting nature in all its glory. But the sacred feminine also functions at a more profound level in their hymns, and it is directly related to the **bhaktas'** perception of women and the Goddess. Throughout India the divine feminine integrates within itself two contrasting attributes, the creative and the destructive, indicative of the ambivalent nature of the cosmos, and represented by both positive and negative images, such as woods, trees, stones, the moon, cows, graves, deep water and the earth itself, many of which, as we have seen, represented shrines to the early Tamils. Personified as a great



and powerful Goddess, she is thought to be a potentially dangerous force, who may bring about death and destruction if she is not regularly propitiated. However, as the consort of a male deity she is seen as benevolent, a source of wealth and fertility, the gentle, submissive and chaste wife of her Lord, her natural power apparently controlled and domesticated by marriage<sup>2</sup>, beliefs which are also attributed to human women in many areas of Indian society, although they are particularly prevalent in Tamil society. In many of their hymns the **bhaktas** identify themselves with women in their relationship with the deity, and, although their primary concern is with the Supreme God Śiva, they also invoke the Goddess in nearly every hymn. Whilst to some extent the **bhakti** conception of the feminine derives from the Pan-Indian ideology<sup>3</sup>, it is also shaped by Tamil beliefs regarding the sacred feminine, beliefs which found their first literary expression in the Caṅkam texts and which may themselves have contributed to the Indian understanding of the divine feminine.

With reference to the classical literature, further illuminated by contemporary ethnographic evidence, I wish to show that the devotees' position as women vis-à-vis God, and their poetic portrayal of the Goddess, are not merely accidental to the **bhaktas**' central religious concern with personal union with Śiva, but are interrelated and essential to their ultimate understanding of the divine, and reflect uniquely Tamil beliefs which continue to have meaning today.

### *The Sacred Feminine in Early Tamil Culture*

In the Caṅkam literature the demonic nature of the divine feminine is illustrated by Koṛṛavai, the ancient Tamil Mother Goddess of war and victory. She is one of the three personified deities of the early literature<sup>4</sup>, and, although references to her are infrequent, they tend to occur in poems in which the social order is disrupted by battle

1/12/

and death. She is also invoked at the end of the Neṭunalvāṭai, a poem in which the **akam** theme of **mullai** predominates, although the prayer takes the form of an appeal to Kor\_ravai by the heroine that her husband may be victorious in battle. Battle appears to have been considered a sacrifice to this Goddess, and, under a poetical theme known as **Kaḷa vēlvi** or **Marakkaḷa vēlvi**, poems which praise a warrior on the defeat of the enemy (eg. Puṛan.369,372-3), the texts mention a terrible ritual which Kailasapathy believes was performed in her honour<sup>5</sup>. This ritual, which was conducted by priestesses at the end of a battle, involved the sacrifice of men and animals by the victors, following which the bodies of the foe were ritually cooked to feed devils and demonesses.

Whilst vivid descriptions of Kor\_ravai are absent from the early classical literature, the terrible and bloodthirsty nature of this Goddess is illustrated in a passage in the Tirumurukā\_ruppaṭai, which describes her as the **pēymakaḷ**, or "she-devil", dancing on the battle-field in the company of Murukaṇ. The image is similar to that of Kālī, and suggests that, by the late classical period, either Kor\_ravai and Kālī were being identified with each other, or that Kor\_ravai represents the indigenous Tamil pre-cursor of the pan-Indian Goddess:

*"...dry-haired,  
twisted and projecting teeth  
in her gaping mouth,  
rolling eye-balls,  
greenish eyes  
with a fearful gaze,  
ears that pain her heavy breasts  
as the owl with bulging eyes  
and the cruel snake  
hang down from her ears  
bothering her breasts.  
In her hands with shining bangles  
she holds a black skull,  
smelling rotten.  
With her cruel, sharp-nailed fingers  
stirring blood*

*she has dug-out human eye-balls  
and eaten them up.  
As she dances, shoulders heaving,  
her mouth drips with fat."*

TMP lines 73-88<sup>6</sup>

Korravai illustrates the divine feminine uncontrolled by a male deity, her association with death and destruction placing her outside the normal social sphere. However, the contrasting view of the divine feminine, in which female sacred power is contained and controlled, does not, in the earliest texts at least, relate to a Goddess, but to human women.

That human woman were perceived to have a sacred character, which required to be controlled through marriage and their own circumscribed behaviour, is most clearly illustrated in the Caṅkam literature by the concept of **aṇaṅku**. As we have seen (above pp.32-33), the term **aṇaṅku** had a variety of different meanings in the classical literature, although, in its specific application to women, it suggests that they were possessed of, and could be possessed by, an extraordinary power, which was inextricably bound to their sexuality and, by implication, their fertility, representing a numinous quality which George L.Hart has called "*the sacred power of women*"<sup>7</sup>.

That a profound change occurred in the status of women with the emergence of their sexuality, directly associated with **aṇaṅku**, is witnessed in the following passage from the Akanānūru in which the foster-mother describes the events surrounding the onset of puberty for a young girl:

*"I told her, 'Your breasts are budding, your sharp teeth glisten, your hair is coiled, and you wear a talai (a dress of leaves strung together and worn by young girls after puberty). Do not go anywhere with your friends who love to wander about. Our ancient town Mutupati has places where aṇaṅku assaults (tākkaṇaṅku). You are under (our)*

*protection (now that you have reached puberty) and you should not go outside. You are no longer a little girl, wise, lovely child'."*

Akan.7<sup>8</sup>

Here **aṇaṇku** is described as an external force considered potentially dangerous to women once they reached sexual maturity, but a passage in the Kuṇtokai indicates that sexually attractive, post-pubescent women were also considered possessed of such a power, which had an equally disturbing effect upon men:

*"The hero speaks: 'The buds of her breasts have blossomed, and soft thick hair falls from her head. Her compact rows of white teeth are full, (having completely replaced) her baby teeth, and (on her body) spots have appeared (a sign of puberty)...I know her, so she afflicts (aṇaṇku) me.'"*

Kuṇ.337<sup>9</sup>

**Aṇaṇku** was thought to reside in a woman's breasts, and, to a lesser extent, her loins, areas of her body intimately connected with her sexual identity and her procreative powers. In Akan.161, for example, the friend describes how the heroine weeps over the absence of her lover *"so coldness spreads on her finely rising young breasts, vexing because a god (aṇaṇku) is there"*<sup>10</sup>, and, in Akan.177, the heroine is described as having *"breasts with aṇaṇku"*<sup>11</sup>.

According to Hart, **aṇaṇku** had to be regulated by various practices and taboos or it could be unleashed to cause chaos and destruction<sup>12</sup>, and, although there is no direct documentation in the Caṅkam texts to substantiate his claim, there is evidence that female behaviour was controlled by a number of different means. One form of control was a woman's **karpu** or "chastity" which, in the Tamil context, has a far wider meaning than mere sexual fidelity. **Karpu** derives from the root **kal** "to learn", and implies a form of inward control, self-denial, modesty, soft-spokenness, obedience, tenderness, and faithfulness<sup>13</sup>. It is *"chastity that is restrained"* (Puṇ. 249<sup>14</sup>),



and "*chastity that (knows) only modesty*" (Puran. 196<sup>15</sup>). In Akan.73 it is directly associated with *aṇaṅku* in a passage in which the friend describes the heroine, as she patiently awaits the return of the hero, as having "*chastity full of aṇaṅku*" (*aṇaṅku uru karpu*<sup>16</sup>).

*Karpu* was located in a woman's breasts, the seat of *aṇaṅku*, and was also associated with female sexual attractiveness, although apparently only in combination with the married state:

*"She has chastity hard to obtain, which banishes all harshness, with a small forehead, large wide loins, and ample hair, a woman who exactly fits her husband's state."*

Puran.166<sup>17</sup>

*Karpu* appears to have been particularly important to the success of a marriage. In Kurun.336 a woman's *karpu* is described as "*chastity which shines in her house*"<sup>18</sup>, and, in a passage in the Akanānūru, a young girl is addressed by a group of married women, all of whom have raised sons, who advise her on her forthcoming marriage:

*"'May you have love so that you care for the man you receive (as husband), and so that you, not slipping from chastity, are a help to him'."*

Akan.86<sup>19</sup>

There is also direct evidence that *karpu* was perceived to have a sacred character - it is variously described as "*chastity joined with a god*" (*kaṭavuḷ cānra karpu* - Puran.198<sup>20</sup>), and "*chastity which has a god*" (*kaṭavuḷ karpu* - Kurun.252, Akan.184<sup>21</sup>).

On one level, therefore, *karpu* appears to be a multifaceted form of learned female control, particularly important to the success and prosperity of a marriage. However, on another level, it appears to denote a sacred quality acquired by women, and may represent the transformation of the more capricious *aṇaṅku* into an auspicious force, through both self-regulation and the institution of marriage.

Women were subject to a number of other behavioural restrictions, particularly concerning menstruation, childbirth and widowhood. In Puṛan.299, for example, the enemy's horses are described "*standing terrified like women who cannot wash dishes (ie. menstruous) in the temple of Murukan*"<sup>22</sup> and, in Puṛan.68, the Kāverī River is compared to a woman's breasts flowing with milk after the **puniru**, a period of seclusion following childbirth<sup>23</sup>, implying that the milk was considered impure before this time. The most severe behavioural restrictions, however, applied to widows who were forbidden to wear ornaments (Puṛan.224,253,261<sup>24</sup>), had to shave off their hair and cake their heads in mud (Puṛan.280<sup>25</sup>), and were required to sleep on beds of stone (Puṛan.246<sup>26</sup>). These austerities were so severe that some women preferred to commit suicide on their husband's funeral pyre - Puṛan.246, for example, relates the suicide of the queen on the death of her husband<sup>27</sup>. The Caṅkam texts do not expand upon the reasons for these female taboos but, as Hart claims, they appear to indicate that a woman's sacred power was considered potentially threatening to the well-being of her family at such times, and therefore had to be controlled by more extreme means.

The disastrous consequences of uncontrolled female power are, however, demonstrated in the Cilappatikāram, the first Tamil Epic, which belongs to the 5th-6thC CE<sup>28</sup>. In this Epic the heroine, Kaṇṇaki, represents the ideal of chaste womanhood, remaining faithful to her adulterous husband, Kōvalaṇ, throughout. When Kōvalaṇ is falsely accused of stealing the queen of Maturai's anklet, and unjustly put to death at the hands of the king, Kaṇṇaki goes to the outskirts of the city, and tears off her right breast<sup>29</sup>, the seat of both **aṇaṅku** and **karpū**, and flings it at Maturai, causing the city to be consumed by fire. Filled with the uncontrolled power of a widow, further intensified by the injustice of her husband's death and her own virtue, she becomes a force for destruction and death. However, Kaṇṇaki is

reacting against the transgression to the moral order caused by the king, and her power, whilst seemingly ruinous, is in fact destroying a wrongful situation and reestablishing righteousness. She dies avenging Kōvalan, but fourteen days after the destruction of Maturai she is taken up to heaven to be with him. In the third book of the Epic, Kaṇṇaki is deified by the Cēra king, a transformation from human to divine status<sup>30</sup> which appears to be the direct result of her chastity and endurance in the name of her husband, suggesting that the early Tamils understood female suffering and self-denial to generate greater spiritual power in women, although it is dependent upon the married state: "*even the gods pay honour to the wife who worships no-one but her husband*"<sup>31</sup>.

#### *Contemporary Tamil Attitudes*

Many of the ancient Tamil ideas concerning women, including the female taboos, are mirrored in contemporary attitudes and behaviour towards women. Although women in Tamiḻnāṭu appear to occupy a position of subordination and servitude within their families, especially in relation to their husbands, they are also believed to possess a powerful sacred force known by the Sanskritic term *śakti*. This force is seen as capricious and potentially malevolent, and women are believed to be able to alter and control events, bringing health and prosperity to their husband and family, or causing poverty, ruin and death<sup>32</sup>.

Out of control a woman's *śakti* becomes a force for evil and destruction, most clearly indicated by attitudes towards, and the behaviour of, widows, unmarried mature women, and barren women. These women are regarded as especially inauspicious, a potential source of social destruction, believed to be in that position because they have sinned, which, in the Tamil context, implies that they have not been sufficiently chaste. After death all these categories of women

are thought to threaten the stability of the social order, but it is the widow in particular who is feared the most - a widow is a woman without social respect, "*the most inauspicious of all inauspicious things*"<sup>33</sup>.

The positive benefits of a woman's śakti require that it is contained, and the two most important means of control are self-regulation through the practice of chastity, and external regulation by male kin, in particular through the institution of marriage.

A woman's śakti is closely associated with her sexuality and female puberty rites, a practice confined to the south in India, are aimed at containing and controlling a girl's emergent sexuality. This life-cycle ritual consists of a series of three rites in which the girl is first segregated from male company following the onset of menstruation, and then undergoes ritual purification to remove the pollution of menstruation. The rites culminate with *caṭaṅku*, the girl's reintroduction back into her family as a marriageable woman in which she is dressed as a benevolent Goddess, usually Lakṣmī, in a sari which she accepts from her maternal uncle, who represents the family into which she will marry<sup>34</sup>. Through this ritual the girl is bound to her future affinal family and her sexuality and potential generative powers channelled towards domesticity and marriage.

Married women are believed to possess the greatest and most auspicious powers, especially those who have raised a son past infancy. They are conferred the status of *Cumaṅkali* (literally "she who is auspicious"), a highly regarded position which represents order, continuity and prosperity, necessary to the well-being of a woman's husband and other male kin, and symbolised by the *tāli*, a yellow thread with a central pendant tied around the woman's neck by her husband at marriage<sup>35</sup>. However, *Cumaṅkali* status is dependent, and remains auspicious only so long as a woman's power is controlled, both by her male kin and her own practice of chastity - she must



remain obedient to her husband, and modest and restrained in all her actions.

To preserve their auspicious state and reaffirm the necessity of women to male well-being, women participate in annual rituals known as **nōṇpu-s**, in which they address various benevolent Goddesses, all regarded as **Cumaṅkali**. These rituals involve mythic re-enactments, fasting and worship, in which the women ritually become the Goddess, and they are performed in the absence of men, who are forbidden to be present. They are mainly designed to strengthen female auspiciousness, the intention of the **Sāvitṛī Nōṇpu** to avoid widowhood, which entails the loss of **Cumaṅkali** status, by bringing health and prosperity to the husband, and that of the **Varalakṣmī Nōṇpu**, which ritually repeats the female life-cycle, to earn everlasting **Cumaṅkali** status. However, in the **Gaurī Nōṇpu**, the central theme is the necessity of women to male well-being. This ritual is based around a myth of Śiva and Pārvatī in which Śiva is left a helpless cripple (or corpse) when Pārvatī leaves him for failing to realize her importance to him. However it is Pārvatī, not Śiva, who seeks reunion, becoming his female half in his manifestation as **Ardhanārīśvara**, again indicating that although the female is necessary to the male, her auspicious status is dependent upon him.

Although Tamil women are regarded as their husband's servants, Holly Reynolds has argued that their subordinate position, which necessarily involves self-denial and suffering in the greater interest of the family group, engenders powers of a spiritual rather than a physical character<sup>36</sup>. They are also acknowledged to have a greater capacity for feeling and emotion, especially love, the result of their suffering, the birth of a child being considered the ultimate suffering. According to Margaret Egnor, "*Women are regarded as inherently more religious than men because they have the greater power of feeling naturally, of suffering for others, of love.*"<sup>37</sup>

Although the unmarried Goddess is considered dangerous, capricious and ferocious throughout India, at both the general and more localised levels, menstrual and widow taboos, and rituals such as the **nōṇpu-s**, designed to control human female behaviour, are of far greater concern in the south of India than in the north, and as we have seen, female puberty rites are the preserve of southern India. The importance of these rituals in the south indicates that female power is considered a greater threat to the stability of society in Tamiḷnāṭu, but it also suggests that modern beliefs and practices regarding women reflect an ancient past, and represent a cultural continuum of ideas which originated in the early Tamil cultural environment. In the Caṅkam literature the destructive nature of the divine feminine was represented by the demoniac Goddess Koṛṛavai, the sacred feminine unassociated with any male figure, who functioned in situations in which the social order was disrupted by conflict. However, within society, women were perceived to be one of the main possessors of sacred power, the result of their sexuality and generative powers, although it was deemed a force for the maintenance and continuation of society, its potential for destruction rendered benevolent through marriage and the practice of chastity, and it is possible that the ancient Tamil concept of **aṇaṅku**, in its specific application to the female, represents an indigenous Tamil precursor of the more fully developed and Pan-Indian concept of śakti.

### *The Feminine in Bhakti: the poets*

The relationship of love between the **bhaktas** and Śiva, and the position of the Goddess in the hymns, must be considered in the light of the foregoing attitudes to the sacred feminine, both as a potentially destructive and creative force, which not only requires to be subdued and contained through marriage and self-denial, but, as a corollary of the suffering that this necessarily entails, results in the enhancement

of the female spiritual condition.

The following examples, drawn from the hymns of the Tēvāram poets and Māṇikkavācakar, are intended to show just how closely the **bhaktas** identified themselves with the female, and, whilst it is not the only manner in which they express their relationship, it appears to be a necessary requirement in their final comprehension of the Absolute.

Initially the devotees fall madly in love with Śiva and become infatuated with him, a state which, as we have seen, they often express in terms of madness and ecstatic possession. But it is also depicted in terms of erotic union, although in Śaiva **bhakti** this is rarely explicit. It is most frequently symbolised through the poetic conventions of the **kuriñci tinaṭai**, in which descriptions of the landscape are employed to represent the hero and heroine and their emotional situation<sup>38</sup>. Whilst the **bhaktas** do not directly identify themselves with the heroine in these hymns, the fact that their hymns relate to their own spiritual experience, and that Śiva, although he may encompass the feminine in his androgynous manifestation as Ardhanārīśvara, is never portrayed as entirely feminine in nature, indicates that this is what is implied - indeed, Śiva is often referred to as **tailavan**, one of the designations for the lover of **akam**. The following references are drawn from the hymns of Campantar, who makes the fullest use of the **karu** of the **kuriñci** landscape in his hymns, the images he employs further evoking the fertility of nature, which has an erotic dimension in itself. For example: "*in Valaṅcuḷi where bees sing, drunk on cool fragrant honey, flowing out of blossoming flowers*" (Cam.II.138.1.<sup>39</sup>); "*Kurṛālam, whose slopes abound in ripe mango fruit, clusters of plantain and the honeyed fruit of jack... in whose spacious groves rich in cool ponds full of lilies the peacock dances with his mate*" (Cam.I.99.4,<sup>740</sup>); and, in a beautiful description of Śiva's shrine at Tiruvaiyāru he describes it as the place where:

*"...the red-legged little egret  
ruffles its feathers with its sharp bill  
to shake them dry from the waters cold  
and looks for prey in the fresh waters  
of a grove flowing with honey."*

Cam.I.130.3.<sup>41</sup>

These descriptions are full of erotic suggestion, the bees and the egret representing the lover, the flowers and the fish (prey) the heroine, and the honey the sweetness of conjugal love. That the experience of the deity suggested in these hymns was perceived as one of conjugal union is supported by other references, which again draw upon the imagery of **akam**. The **bhaktas**, speaking through the voices of female characters, including the heroine herself, tell of Śiva stealing the heroine's "*chastity and modesty*" (Cam.73.8, 154.10<sup>42</sup>), of how he has "*tasted the fresh nectar of my beauty*" (App.12.1<sup>43</sup>), and describe him as "*the lord who stole my heart, untying my hair which is full of humming bees*" (Cam.362.4<sup>44</sup>), the loosening or disheveling of hair representative of sexual intercourse in **akam**. The **akam** poems are full of references to the disapproving gossip to which the heroine subjects herself through her clandestine affair, and similarly in **bhakti** - in the following hymn by Appar he describes the heroine in terms which suggest that she has eloped with the deity, and further implies the social disgrace her action provokes<sup>45</sup>:

*"Once she heard his name  
then learned of his lovely form.  
Then she heard of his excellent town,  
and fell madly in love with him.  
That same day she left her mother and father  
and the proper ways of the world,  
lost herself,  
lost her good name.  
This woman has joined the feet  
of the Lord, her lover(talaivan)."*

App.VI.239.7.<sup>46</sup>



Loss of chastity and anti-social behaviour, including the madness that Śiva induces in his devotees, examined in the previous chapter, are indicative of the initial transformation of the **bhaktas'** spiritual consciousness from the worldly to the divine plane, but the union with the deity that the **bhaktas** so fervently long for is not obedient to their desires. It is a fragile state which does not endure, and, as in **akam**, the main experience of love is that of separation and the pain of absence.

Like the heroine in **akam** the **bhaktas** display physical signs of the effects of separation and longing. This is particularly true in the hymns of the Tēvāram poets who describe how their complexions are spoilt and take on a greenish colour, of their bangles slipping off their wrists as they grow lean in their longing for Śiva, and of sleepless nights awaiting him. For example: "*the greenish complexion has spread all over her breasts and spoilt her beauty*" (Cun 37.7<sup>47</sup>), "*the bangles drop from my hands as I grow lean day by day...*" (Cun 37.2<sup>48</sup>); "*now he is gone, taking my beauty with him, leaving me pale as the kumil flower*" (Cam I.73.8.<sup>49</sup>). Speaking with the voice of the heroine Campantar describes Siva as: "*the Lord who stole my beauty and caused the bangles slowly to slip from my wrists*" (Cam.362.7<sup>50</sup>); and, taking the role of the heroine's friend, Appar describes the intense pain and longing of his love:

*"She contemplates her love, pouring out tears, her bangles dropping off as she grows lean due to the pangs of separation, and longs with melting heart to unite with him".*

App.201.5.<sup>51</sup>

All four poets composed hymns in the **tūtu** genre, a Caṅkam poetic mode in which creatures of nature were employed to convey messages of love between the hero and the heroine, usually to express the pain of separation and the longing for the lover's return. In **bhakti** the poets employ the same motifs, using birds and other animals, and

even the wind, to act as messengers between themselves and the deity, and, whilst in **akam** these messages were a two-way affair, in **bhakti** they are always written from the standpoint of the heroine. For example, in a hymn by Campantar he pleads:

*"King bee  
who hums melodious tunes,  
drinking honey from lotuses  
in lovely rippling pools  
in the company of your mate!  
Out of compassion for me,  
won't you tell my state  
to the Lord who wears the bright crescent moon,  
who wears a garland of bones on his chest,  
the pāṇṭaraṅkam dancer  
who lives in holy Tōṇipuram?"*

Cam.1.60.1.<sup>52</sup>

They become jealous in their love, to such an extent that, in a hymn by Cuntarar, in which he describes himself as a woman who has fallen in love at the sight of Śiva at Tirupaiṇṇīli when he comes in procession as a beggar, he even appears to be jealous of Śiva's relationship with the Goddess, and therefore refuses alms:

*"O Lord who dwells in the burning-ground! You carry the human skull and cry out 'I live at Paiṇṇīli; will you please give me a little as alms?' The ashes on your body shine white like pearl. You appear half woman with your beautiful long eyes. You carry another lady on your head. So we cannot offer you alms; walk away".*

Cun.36.5.<sup>53</sup>

The **bhaktas'** love, aroused by the initial encounter with the deity, progresses through stages which deepen and enhance it, the inchoate passion of the first experience being transformed, through the agony and torment of absence, into a deeper understanding of the totality of love. In **akam** the relationship between the hero and heroine had, in order to be considered fully consummated, to result in marriage, and, ultimately, the most profound example for the **bhaktas'**

love of Śiva is that of a wife. The shrines are the places where the lovers meet, but they are also the home of the deity, and, like human wives, the **bhaktas** come to live with Śiva, and are thereby cured of confusion and karma (eg. App. VI.229.7., Cun. VII.41.3., Cam. I.10.2.<sup>54</sup>), their greatest sins dissolved (App. VI.229.8., Cam. II.175.3.<sup>55</sup>). They address Śiva as **maṇālar** "bridegroom", and **nāyakaṇ** "husband" - Cuntarar, for example, calls Śiva "*my gem, O bridegroom...*" (Cun. VII.54.9.<sup>56</sup>), and Appar refers to Śiva as "*the eternal bridegroom*" (App IV.15.7.), and describes himself "*thinking of the bridegroom*" (App V.164.2.<sup>57</sup>). The initial fervour of Appar's experience of God's love becomes one of great tenderness and sweetness<sup>58</sup>:

*"Sweeter than sweet fruit, raw cane sugar,  
lovely women with fresh flowers in their hair,  
sweeter than sole dominion over vast lands,  
is Iṭaimarutu's Lord  
to those who reach him."*

App. V.128.10.<sup>59</sup>

On numerous occasions in the Tiruvācakam Māṇikkavācakar refers to Śiva as bridegroom and husband<sup>60</sup>, and relates how he is owned and possessed by the deity. But in Tiru.9:12 he also tells of how he is "subdued" (**akappaṭu**) by Śiva, and, in Tiru. 30.6, states that Śiva has bestowed upon him "*that unique karpu which is unwavering*"<sup>61</sup>, as though the deity has domesticated and controlled him through marriage. These ideas appear to be the direct result of his conception of himself as a woman in love with a male deity, although it is not his generative power which is controlled but his human proclivities - according to Yocum, Śiva acts as "*the subduer of the misguided inclinations of his devotees*"<sup>62</sup>.

By actively identifying themselves with women the **bhaktas** emphasise the highly personal nature of their relationship with the deity, but it also seems to be a necessary precondition for the full

realisation of the totality of God's love. Whilst their initial experience is one of ecstatic joy, by becoming women they expose themselves to the pain and suffering of absence, and bring to their love a greater intensity and range of feeling. Ramanujan has shown that the female **bhaktas** did not undergo any change of status in their relationship with the deity<sup>63</sup>, and the evidence appears to indicate that in order to render themselves fully accessible to the deity the male devotees had to take on the emotional psyche of women, the suffering this entailed endowing them with a greater capacity of spiritual power. However, by identifying themselves with women the **bhaktas** become susceptible to other indigenous ideas regarding the sacred feminine. Just as a woman secures her chastity by complete submission to her husband, the devotees secure the removal of their sins through their total surrender to the deity. By submitting themselves to Śiva in the manner of a wife, their behaviour is contained and controlled by the deity, and, in the case of Māṇikkavācakar, Śiva is actually depicted conferring **karpū** upon him. However, although the female is spiritually powerful, she is also dependent upon her husband for her benevolence, and the **bhaktas** are equally reliant upon the deity - their spiritual experience is not one of identification, but of total dependence, and they remain eternally distinct from Śiva.

These beliefs are reflected in the **bhaktas'** conception of the Goddess, whose role in the hymns functions as both a mythological correlative for the poets' own spiritual experience, and represents the ideal to which they aspire.

### *The Goddess*

The numerous mythological allusions to the Goddess in the **bhakti** hymns derive, in the main, from the Purāṇic tradition of the north, but her role in the **bhakti** hymns is dependent upon the indigenous Tamil understanding of the sacred feminine. She is never



portrayed independently in the hymns, but always in conjunction with Śiva: as a force with the potential for harm she is depicted contained and controlled by the male deity, as his loving and beautiful wife she represents the paradigmatic model for the devotees' relationship with Śiva, and, as the female half of Śiva's androgynous manifestation as Ardhanārīśvara, the male and female principles are portrayed as mutually dependent and inseparable.

As a potentially destructive force the Goddess is most frequently portrayed as the celestial river Gaṅgā, the life-giving river caught in Śiva's matted locks, and thereby tamed and controlled in her descent to earth. Based on the Purāṇic myth of Bhagīratha's request to Śiva to save the world from the harmful power of the Gaṅgā as it fell to earth, Campantar describes Śiva as "*Araṇ who took the turbulent Ganges in his matted hair*" (Cam III.327.6.<sup>64</sup>), transforming it into "*a murmuring stream with foaming waves (which) flows over the cool crescent moon*" (Cam I.39.1.<sup>65</sup>), and Appar relates how Śiva "... *bore lightly on his red hair the Ganges which descended with force in many angry streams*" (App.IV.73.<sup>66</sup>). This myth illustrates the poets' concern that the potency of the Goddess be restrained, and thereby transformed into a power for good, but it also appears to be acting as an allegory for their own experience, suggesting that it is they who are contained and controlled by Śiva. Although it is a Pan-Indian myth, that the **bhakti** understanding of the Goddess was conceived of in indigenous terms is illustrated in a hymn by Campantar in which she is referred to directly as **aṇaṅku**:

*"This is Ālavāy shrine,  
abode of the Lord whose matted hair is adorned  
by the fragrant konrai, the moon, and the cruel snake,  
the river (aṇaṅku), and the garland of vanni and  
pretty kūviḷam..."*

Cam.III.378.4.<sup>67</sup>

**Aṇaṅku** is employed as a designation for the Goddess on two

occasions in Māṇikkavācakar's Tiruvācakam and, on both occasions, she is seen to be controlled and contained by her association with Śiva: in Tiru.13:7, for example, she is described as *aṇaṅku* whilst dancing with Śiva at Tillai in a reference to Śiva's defeat of Kālī in a dance contest, whereby he rescued the universe from her devastating anger; and, in Tiru.20:6, Māṇikkavācakar addresses Śiva as "*O Bridegroom of aṇaṅku*"<sup>68</sup>. As Yocum argues, "*clearly aṇaṅku is held in check and rendered beneficent by the marital bond...*"<sup>69</sup>. However, <sup>NP</sup> the Goddess also appears to control Śiva. In the hymns his ferocious aspect is moderated by her presence - she is never associated with his more extreme behaviour, such as dancing in the crematorium at night or the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice<sup>70</sup>. In the following hymn by Cuntarar, which is set in the *pālai tiṇai*, the wasteland far from ordinary society, the poet indicates how unsuitable such a place full of danger and menace is for the Goddess:

*"This is a great wilderness  
resounding with the hoot of the owl,  
which terrifies the beautiful Goddess,  
cruel wicked hunters live here.  
Handsome Lord at Kōṭikkulakar  
why have you made for yourself  
a temple in this place?"*

Cun.VII.32.4.<sup>71</sup>

Portrayed as Śiva's consort the Goddess possesses all the virtues of a chaste and loving wife, and, as such, she represents the epitome of devotion, the paradigmatic model for the *bhaktas'* relationship with the deity. Her sacred power is apparently restrained and subdued not only by her marriage to the deity but by her own regulated behaviour. She is the Goddess "*who loved him (Siva) and treasured him in her heart*" (Cun.VII.61.10<sup>72</sup>), "*the lady of all blessings*", "*Umā of speech as sweet as music*" (App.V.124.1<sup>73</sup>) and "*speech as sweet as sugar cane*" (Cam.I.46.2<sup>74</sup>). Descriptions of her physical appearance further recall the Caṅkam association of chastity with sexual attractiveness.

For example: she is "*Umā who has a slender waist*" (Cam.I.69.4<sup>75</sup>), "*Umā of the full breasts*" (Cam.I.69.102<sup>76</sup>), and "*the Goddess who has long, dark hair and eyes curved like swords*" (Cun.VII.5.6.<sup>77</sup>). She is depicted in identical terms to the female devotees in the hymns<sup>78</sup>, the physical resemblances further indicating that the **bhaktas** perceived human women to have a divine status:

*"...dancing girls with long carp-like eyes  
and breasts adorned with jewels,  
women lovely as peacocks, with coral lips,  
bright smile and long, dark hair!..."*  
Cun VII.69.7.<sup>79</sup>

Rendered benevolent by her marriage to Śiva the Goddess participates in his acts of grace to his devotees and, in the following example from the Tiruvācakam, in which she is pictured as a raincloud, the image conveys the positive consequences for the devotees which derive from her conjunction with the male aspect:

*"Our Mistress is like a rain cloud  
which diminishes the water of the sea  
and then rises up..."*

*O cloud,  
pour down upon us  
like the sweet grace (aru!)  
which she gives to the devotees  
of our King  
who is not separate from our Mistress"*  
Tiru.7:16<sup>80</sup>

The most frequent references to the Goddess in the hymns are as Śiva's female half in his manifestation as the androgynous Ardhanārīśvara<sup>81</sup>. In this role the Goddess is seen as an essential and integral part of his being, the ultimate expression of divine totality. Many references are formulaic, consisting of one or two lines, although the **bhaktas** also devote entire stanzas, and even hymns, to Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara, indicative of the importance to the poets of

the deity in his manifestation as the androgyne:

*"...having taken as half himself/the soft girl with waist  
small as gathered lightning" (Cam.I.77.1.<sup>82</sup>)*

*"...the body like a white lotus that he shares/with the  
Goddess with soft young breasts..." (Cun.VII.84.1.<sup>83</sup>)*

*"...shares his body with the Goddess..."  
(Cam.II.140.11.<sup>84</sup>)*

*"...he shares his form with the Goddess whose shoulders  
curve gracefully like the bamboo" (Cam.II.221.1.<sup>85</sup>)*

In Tiru.7:13 Māṇikkavācakar employs natural images to describe Ardhanārēśvara, although he does not utilize the conventions of the **akam** genre, and, whilst his use of natural description acts as a metaphor for his own religious experience, in this hymn it is more descriptive than suggestive - the **kuvalai** flowers and the birds are associated with the Goddess, and the lotus flowers and snakes with Śiva. Māṇikkavācakar also casts himself as a female devotee as he participates in the experience of Śiva Ardhanārēśvara, again indicating the importance of being female for the **bhaktas** in their encounter with the divine:

*"Plunge into the swelling pool  
which resembles our Lady (pirāṭṭi) and our King  
with its fresh dark kuvalai flowers  
and its fresh red lotus blossoms,  
with its beautiful flock of birds  
and its entwined snakes,  
  
and with the coming of those people  
who wash away their impurity (malam).  
With conch-shell bangles tinkling,  
the sound of our anklets joining in,  
our breasts swelling,  
the water set foaming,  
Plunge and playfully bathe in the lotus-filled water."  
Mani.7:13<sup>86</sup>*

The ultimate mystical vision for Appar is of the God and



Goddess together at the shrine of Tiruvaiyāru. In a hymn entirely dedicated to Śiva and his spouse, each verse starts with a reference to the divine couple, and then associates them with a different pair of mated animals: "*I saw an elephant come with its beloved mate*" (vs.1); "*I saw the banded cuckoo come dancing with its mate*" (vs.3). Although he does not specifically portray himself as a woman in this hymn, the manner in which he depicts his approach to the deity suggests that he is identifying himself with a female, offering praise to Śiva in the company of other female devotees. At the end of every verse he repeats the refrain "*I saw what I had never seen before*", and it is as if he has first had to understand every nuance of feeling involved in the male and female relationship, by becoming a woman himself, to fully comprehend the totality which is Śiva:

*"Singing of the Lord who wears the crescent moon  
as a wreath on his hair,  
and with him the Goddess with speech as sweet as honey,  
I came, crying, "Where will my Lord  
reveal his grace to me?"  
When I reached Aiyāru,  
where young women dance, I saw  
a green parrot flying with its mate,  
I saw the Lord's holy feet,  
I saw what I had never seen before."*

App.IV.3.10.<sup>87</sup>

For Appar the male and female principles are both "*the very essence of his (Śiva's) beauty*" (App.IV.8.10.<sup>88</sup>), and Māṇikkavācakar refers to Ardhanārīśvara as "*the Lord's ancient form*" (Tiru.10:18<sup>89</sup>), implying that it is his original form. Ultimately the Goddess is a part of Śiva's totality, the male and female together representing two facets of one Supreme Truth, the potentially disruptive behaviour of both balanced by the presence of the other. For the **bhaktas** Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara is all-encompassing, the source from which all else derives, but he is also dependent upon the female aspect for his completeness. By identifying themselves with

women the **bhaktas** are able to fully participate in that totality whilst remaining distinct, and ever able to experience the deity's love and grace.

1. For an in depth discussion of the role of the feminine in Buddhism see Diana Y.Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, Berkeley Asian Humanities Press 1979.
2. See Lawrence A.Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India*, New York 1975, pp.215-246.
3. According to Bridget and Raymond Allchin (1982, p.99), "*When man first started to cultivate crops and to herd his own domesticated animals, an increased interest in fertility and in magical means promoting it appears to have become an almost universal aspect of culture...*". The cyclicity of the agricultural process and the seemingly inexhaustable fecundity possessed by the earth, together with inevitable death and decay, may have resulted in the earth being perceived as both feminine and sacred, and personified as a great and powerful Goddess.
4. See above Chp.2, p.33.
5. See Kailasapathy, 1968, pp.241-242.
6. Trans. by Zvelebil, 1973, p.126.
7. Hart, 1975, pp.81-137. Also see his article, "Woman and the Sacred in Ancient Tamilnad", *Journal of Asian Studies* 32, 1973, pp.233-250.
8. Hart, 1975, p.93.
9. Ibid. pp.98-99.
10. Hart, 1973, p.239.
11. Hart, 1975, p.99.
12. Ibid. pp.87ff, and 1973, pp.233ff.
13. Hart, 1973, p.243. The Tamil conception of female chastity is slightly different to the Brahmanical understanding of the term - in Sanskrit chastity is denoted by **pātivratyam** or "the state of keeping one's vows to one's husband", and it lacks the more profound connotations of the Tamil meaning. The differences in meaning are also reflected in the Tamil and Sanskrit words for rape. In Tamil rape or **karpalittal** means the "destroying of chastity", or the elimination of all of a woman's virtuous qualities, and it is an act which carries grave consequences, not only for those directly involved, but for society as a whole, whilst in Sanskrit it is denoted by **balāt sambhoga** "enjoying (a woman) by force", or **dūṣaṇa** "spoiling", and, whilst a serious crime, these terms imply the physical act of rape itself, and lack the sense of moral dishonour and humiliation suffered by the woman intimated by the Tamil term.
14. Hart, 1975, p.97.
15. Ibid.

16. Ibid. p.96.

17. Ibid. p.97.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid. p.96.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid. p.93.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid. pp.102-104.

25. Ibid. p102.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid. p.103. Although the practice of attributing sacred power to a woman and her chastity is found in the Sanskrit Epics from ca.3BCE, Hart believes that it originated with the indigenous peoples of India, and specifically with the Dravidian cultures of the south, and gradually penetrated northwards - widow tonsure, for example, is not attested ~~to~~ in Sanskrit literature until at least 6 centuries after it is first attested in Tamil literature (see ibid. pp.113-119).

28. See Zvelebil, 1973, pp.172-175. Although the epic reflects motifs which made their first appearance in the literature from ca.3CE, Zvelebil believes that, in its present form, the Cilappatikāram "*cannot have been composed before the 5th-6th Cent.AD.*" (p.175).

29. The importance of a woman's breasts as the locus of sacred power is emphasised by the myth of the marriage of Mīnākṣī, attached to the Mīnākṣī Temple in Maturai. This myth concerns a girl born with three breasts who is brought up by her parents as a son; on the battle-field she discovers her husband, Śiva, and the third breast disappears, her marriage transforming her from a violent, dangerous and disordered woman, reminiscent of Korravai, into a gentle wife.

30. The myth of Valli and Murukan also represents the transition of a human woman to divine status. The standard version of the myth is contained in the 14th C Kantapurāṇam, but, as Zvelebil notes (1977, pp. 227-246, p.227), it must preserve ancient features which developed over the centuries, although it is not until the Paripāṭal that there is any great literary evidence regarding their relationship in the classical literature (see above Chp.2 p.34 and p.49,n.50). The myth relates a relationship which progresses through stages, starting with Valli's resistance to



Murukan's amorous advances, when he approaches her whilst she is working in the millet fields. The deity seduces her by turning himself into an elephant and frightening her into his arms. However, their marriage takes place within three days of her seduction, and she then ascends to heaven to be with him. Brenda Beck has shown certain parallels between this myth and that of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in northern mythology, but Rādhā remains Kṛṣṇa's mistress for ever, and Valli's marriage to Murukan is indicative of the desirability of marriage in the Tamil environment - see Brenda E.F.Beck, "The Courtship of Valli and Murugan: Some Parallels with the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Story", Hawley and Wulff eds., *The Divine Consort*, Beacon Press, Boston 1982, pp.262-277.

31. Hart, 1973, p.243.

32. See Susan S.Wadley "The Paradoxical Powers of Tamil Women", her own article in Wadley, ed., *The Powers of Tamil Women*, Syracuse (N.Y.) Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University 1980, pp.153-170.

33. Holly Baker Reynolds, "The Auspicious Married Woman", in Wadley, ed., 1980, pp.35-60, p.36.

34. See Reynolds *ibid.* pp.41-43 - Tamils practice prescriptive cross-cousin marriage and females therefore marry into a family which is already known to them. It is interesting that divine marriages reflect the social pattern. When Murukan marries Valli, for example, he is marrying an appropriate partner. In popular tradition Valli is regarded as the daughter of Viṣṇu, and Murukan (Skanda) is the son of Pārvaṭī. Pārvaṭī is further held to be the sister of Viṣṇu, and therefore Murukan is marrying his mother's brother's daughter, his cross-cousin.

35. The **tāli** appears to embody the power of the woman who wears it, indicated by a number of acts performed upon it - for example its colour is renewed daily with turmeric paste; it is regularly checked for frayed threads because if it should break it will have adverse repercussions; the threads are changed on auspicious days; and it is never removed as this may result in the husband's death.

The Caṅkam literature mentions **tālis**, although they are not described as ornaments for married women - the tiger-tooth **tāli** was worn by men as a symbol of strength and bravery, and young children wore a protective **tāli**. However, there are references to a precious ornament which could not be removed, given by a man exclusively to his wife - see Reynolds *ibid.* p.44f.

36. Reynolds *ibid.* p.57.

37. Margaret Egnor, "On the Meaning of Śakti to Women in Tamil Nadu", in Wadley *ibid.* pp.1-34, pp.20-21.

38. For a more complete appraisal of the **akam** conventions functioning within **bhakti** please refer back to Chp.2, pp.26-27.

39. Petersen, 1989, p.123.

40. Ibid. pp.171-72.

41. Ibid. p.165. This hymn can be compared with Kurun.25:

*"None else was there but he, the thief,  
If he denies it, what shall I do?  
Only a heron stood by,  
its thin gold legs like millet-stalks  
eyeing the āral-fish  
in the gliding water  
on the day  
he took me."*

trans. Zvelebil, 1973, p.116.

42. Kandiah, 1974, p.220.

43. Ibid. p.228.

44. Ibid. p.241. See pp.214-266 for further examples on the same theme.

45. See Petersen, 1989, pp.248-249, for other examples of **bhakti** hymns which relate the social disapproval a woman whose love was not fulfilled by marriage occasioned.

46. Ibid. p.245.

47. Kandiah, 1974, p.256.

48. Ibid. p.257.

49. Petersen, 1989, pp.104-5.

50. Kandiah, 1974, p.241.

51. Ibid. p.245.

52. Petersen, 1989, p.245.

53. Kandiah, 1974, p.236.

54. Petersen, 1989, pp.117,149,166.

55. Ibid. pp.117, 159.

56. Ibid. p.307.

57. Ibid. p.105.

58. Terms such as "sugar cane", "honey" and "ambrosia" are Tamil metaphors for the beloved, and the **bhaktas** refer to Śiva by such terms on numerous occasions in their hymns (eg. App.V.207.8., IV.39.7.; Cun.VII.51.2., VII.58.6. - see Petersen *ibid.*, pp.216, 287, 225, 242).

59. *Ibid.* p.210.

60. For example: 4:183, 17:3, 4:113, 5:59, 6:9, 21:9, 29:3, 33:7, 49:3, 50:2, 23:5, 44:3 - see Yocum, 1977, p.375, and n.9, pp.385-86.

61. *Ibid.* p.378, and n.17, pp.386-387.

62. *Ibid.* p.369 and p.374.

63. A.K.Ramanujan, "On Women Saints", in Hawley and Wulff eds., *The Divine Consort*, 1982, pp.316-324. Their relationships with human men are, however, of a different character - Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār is said to have terrified her husband by performing miracles, and turned into a skeleton when confronted by a sexually aroused man.

64. Petersen, 1989, p.174.

65. *Ibid.* p.118.

66. *Ibid.* p.137.

67. *Ibid.* p.274.

68. Yocum, 1977, pp.372-373.

69. *Ibid.* p.373.

70. See *ibid.* pp.371-73.

71. Petersen, 1989, p.177.

72. *Ibid.* p.201.

73. *Ibid.* p.297.

74. *Ibid.* p.121.

75. *Ibid.* p.169.

76. *Ibid.* p.170.

77. *Ibid.* p.234.

78. Māṇikkavācakar praises the physical attributes of the Goddess and the female devotees, but, unlike the Tēvāram poets, also condemns "ordinary" human women for arousing his lust. Compare for example:

*"Down into the hot waters of lust I plunged,  
where the crocodiles, those red-lipped women,  
bite and devour me..."*

Tiru.6:41 (from Yocum, 1977, p.377)

*"O you fair women  
whose eyes are streaked with red as flowers,  
whose arms bear golden bracelets,  
whose Venus mounts are like a cobra's hood,  
let us sing about Him..."*

Tiru.9:12 (ibid. p.376)

Yocum has suggested that this apparent paradox can be explained because Māṇikkavācakar fears that, as a male, he might threaten female chastity by acting upon his desires. However, as we have seen, whilst female chastity is associated with the married state, it is also dependent upon the self-regulated behaviour of the woman herself, and, to unleash the terrible consequences of unrestricted *aṇṇku*, Māṇikkavācakar would have to violate a woman. His hymns belong to the 9th century, and it seems more likely that Brahmanic values were, by that time, exerting a greater moralising influence upon him than on the earlier Nāyanmārs.

79. Petersen, 1989, p.309.

80. Yocum, 1977, p.371.

81. Yocum has counted 70 references to the Ardhanārīśvara form in the Tiruvācakam alone. See *ibid*, n.18, p.387.

82. Petersen, 1989, p.105.

83. *Ibid*. p.106.

84. *Ibid*. p.108.

85. *Ibid*. p.109. Many other hymns in the Tēvāram include references to Ardhanārīśvara. For example: Cam.I.40.1., I.98.1., I.100.9., II.148.1.; App.IV.48.3., VI.229.1,3,7., VI.311.10; Cun.VII.32.5, 6., VII.89.6., VII.90.10.

86. Yocum, 1977, p.380.

87. Petersen, 1989, pp.300-301.

88. *Ibid*. p.105.



89. Yocum, 1977, p.379.

### Conclusion

The contribution of Tamil culture and tradition to **bhakti** is profound. It pervades every level of religious expression and apprehension, informing both the **bhaktas'** conception of Śiva and their own position in relation to the deity. Although **bhakti** represents the integration of two separate cultural traditions, by bringing typically Tamil preconceptions to bear upon fundamental Āryan concepts and beliefs the **bhaktas** accomodated them to the Tamil world-view, and thereby transformed them. It also conflicted with the orthodox tradition on a number of essential points, and the result was a religious faith which, in many ways, opposed Brahmanical ideology. Salvation did not lie in total detachment from the world, to be achieved by the practice of ascetical techniques or intellectual exercise, but was an immediate experience, involving active participation in the divine, in the form of a loving and gracious God. The **bhaktas** did not seek God beyond the world but in the very landscape of Tamiḷnāṭu itself, and they entered into a highly intimate and personal relationship with the deity. By rejecting the exclusive position of brahmans as religious leaders, they revolutionised the whole approach to divinity, opening the spiritual path to all, no matter sex or caste, and thereby affirmed the value of human existence in the relationship with divinity. The **bhaktas'** passionate desire to experience Śiva emotionally, through all their senses, resulted in the integration of features, both secular and religious, which derived from the indigenous tradition, and Tamil Śaiva **bhakti** represents the re-

assertion, in a new context, of Tamil ideals and tradition.

The hymns of the Nāyaṁmārs established Śiva as one of the foremost deities in the south, but his persona assumed a character typical of the Tamil region, which, in many respects, is representative of the integration and adaptation of features originally associated with Murukaṇ. Murukaṇ was the great lover and War-god of the classical Tamil age, a God of youth and beauty, capable of acting within the world, and invoked as a protector, hero and king. The Nāyaṁmārs' conception of Śiva was not as a distant God, functioning solely in the cosmic realm, but as a close and personal deity, immanent in the landscape of Tamiḷnāṭu and approachable in the temple, who could be responded to directly. Śiva as the aloof ascetic, withdrawn in contemplation, is of little relevance to the **bhaktas**, and in their hymns they concentrate on his attributes of Lordship, beauty and divine grace. The various correspondences between the characters of the two Gods, particularly their erotic and ferocious dimensions, must have facilitated Śiva's rise to prominence in the south, but, by assimilating Murukaṇ into the Śaiva pantheon as Skanda, the **bhaktas** acknowledged an implicit connection between the two deities whilst emphasising Śiva's position as the Supreme deity.

The Nāyaṁmārs expressed their intense love and devotion for Śiva through the medium of their hymns, and, in contradistinction to Brahmanism, they employed the vernacular language of the region, rendering their hymns accessible to the mass of the Tamil population. By further implementing the associative structure of **akam**, in which human meaning was implicit in natural descriptions, they communicated profound religious feelings to an audience which was aware of the greater implications inherent in the poetic conventions. Although the **akam** conventions, unique to the Tamil region, were first employed with religious intent in the Paripāṭal, and then the Tirumurukāṛruppaṭai, in these texts the conventions were utilised to

suggest only one aspect of emotion, the perfection of love, which Murukan, as the God of the kuriñci landscape, had, by the late classical period, (come to embody). But the emotions induced in the **bhaktas** by Śiva were not confined to a single tiṇai. Their spiritual apprehension encompassed the entire range of emotive experience and feeling once attributed to the secular love affair, and the **bhaktas** fully adapted the symbolic language of **akam** to describe and suggest their spiritual condition. Although the hymns represent the response of individuals to a personal deity, the very anonymity of the love relationship demanded by the conventions of **akam** also served to universalise the divine relationship, allowing the listener to identify personally with the emotional situation. The **bhaktas** brought further verve and colour to their hymns by utilising typically Tamil poetic imagery and idioms, and the result was some of the most beautiful and evocative religious poetry in the Hindu tradition.

The **akam** genre served as a symbolic medium for the expression of profound religious feelings, but the Nāyanmārs also continued in the literary mode of **puram**. This genre, originally utilised to praise local kings and heroes, served as the perfect idiom to express the **bhaktas'** status as servants to a master, and they also employed it to celebrate Śiva's mythological deeds, visualising them in terms similar to the bardic portrayal of the exploits of heroes of the classical Tamil age. Although the **bhaktas** did not specifically localise Śiva's mythological deeds, by juxtaposing the myths with descriptions of the Tamil landscape and directly relating them to Śiva as the indweller of a particular local shrine, they emphasised both the deity's transcendent, unlimited nature and his intensely local character. The mythological allusions also functioned in a similar manner to the **akam** conventions, suggesting something beyond the description, and serving as metaphors for the **bhaktas'** own spiritual condition.

Through the conventions of **akam**, the emotional experience of



**bhakti** became identified with the very land of Tamiḷnāṭu itself, and, by locating the deity in numerous shrines throughout the region, the **bhaktas** fully integrated Śiva into the Tamil environment, further emphasising his Tamil character, and Tamiḷnāṭu as his domain. The shrine as the abode of the deity is of paramount importance in **bhakti**, and every hymn in the Tēvāram is dedicated to a specific manifestation of Śiva at a particular, named shrine. The rise of the **bhakti** movement coincided with the construction of the first permanent temples in Tamiḷnāṭu, initially under the patronage of the Pallavas who came to power there at the end of the 6th century. Many of these rock-cut and stone-built temples are dedicated to Śiva as the Supreme deity, but, despite their correlation in time and place with the **bhakti** movement, the evidence indicates that they had little relevance to the **bhakti** shrines. Although a number of the Nāyaṇmārs are traditionally associated with the ruling dynasties of the Tamil renaissance, the architectural and inscriptional evidence for these temples suggests that they served, at the outset, to symbolise the correspondence between the sovereign and the deity, in the manner of Purāṇic kingship, rather than any alliance between sovereignty and **bhakti**. The majority of the **bhakti** shrines are concentrated in the Kāverī Delta region, indicative of the importance of the Cōḷa environment to **bhakti**, and suggesting that it was in this area that Śaiva **bhakti** had its roots. However, although literary evidence indicates that a Cōḷa king of the late classical period lent support to the **bhakti** movement, and may have been involved in the construction of a number of **bhakti** shrines, in the majority of instances the shrines appear to have been located at sites considered sacred by the early Tamils. The classical literature indicates that the early Tamils perceived the divine as present in the phenomenal world, localised in particular places and things, and, as archaeological and ethnographic evidence substantiates, the earliest Tamil shrines took the form of stones or trees, associated with ancient

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cults of the Goddess, heroes and Murukan. The main criteria for the sacred nature of the **bhakti** shrines appears to have been the antiquity of the site, and its association with features of the natural environment thought to manifest sacred by earlier tradition, and this is supported by the names given to the shrines in the **bhakti** hymns themselves. The early shrines were unconfined by any structural appendage, although, by the late classical period, as evidence for Murukan's worship in the Paripāṭal and the Tirumurukāruppaṭai indicates, the sacred was being localised into specific named temples. The shrines of the **bhakti** hymns represent the fulfilment of this process of localisation of the sacred into specific shrines, and, by journeying from one shrine to another, the Nāyanmārs also created a network of temples which served to lend the Śaiva **bhakti** movement cohesion across the entire length and breadth of Tamiḷnāṭu, helping to spread the movement, and establish Śiva as a pan-Tamil God.

Śiva was (not only) accessible in the temple but in the hearts and minds of his devotees, inducing in the **bhaktas** an ecstatic state of consciousness which the poets understood as divine possession. It was accompanied by various outward displays of feeling, including tears, dance and fainting, symptomatic of the intensity of the experience. The **bhakti** experience of Śiva, however, involved not only the individual poet but the entire Śaiva community. The hymns functioned as both a passive medium of contact between the poet and the wider community, and also actively encouraged participation in the experience of Śiva through singing, chanting, dancing, weeping, with the promise of spiritual rewards for those who did so. The ecstatic and communal nature of Tamil **bhakti** is incongruous with Brahmanical ideology, and recalls the earlier worship of Murukan, which was characterised by its physical and ritualistic dimensions. Murukan's worship involved the active participation of worshippers in religious experience, and included shamanic rituals at which the deity was

invoked by the vēlan. The vēlan's possession was deliberate and voluntary, induced through the performance of an ecstatic dance in order to perform an intermediary role between the deity and the wider community. Although the Nāyanmārs' possession was largely spontaneous, accompanied by hysterical behaviour indicative of the initial transformation of their spiritual consciousness, in many ways it parallels the ecstatic, personal and intimate relationship between the vēlan and Murukan, although the Nāyanmārs fully transferred the arena of spiritual experience to the temple and the medium of communication to their hymns. As a culturally legitimate medium for the transmission of inspired truths the hymns also had a precedent in the earlier tradition, and, as in the past, mediated knowledge of the highest reality not only to the wider community in which the poets lived, but also to subsequent generations through oral transmission and eventual canonisation in the Tirumurai.

**Bhakti** is a religion of intense emotion, and encompasses both ecstatic joy and pain and longing. Separation and absence are an integral part of the **bhakti** relationship with Śiva, and, although the symbolic language of **akam** provided the perfect idiom for the expression of their love in all its different aspects, the **bhaktas** do more than just continue in a line of literary convention. In many hymns they closely identify themselves with the woman-in-love, and ardently experience the emotions of the **akam** relationship in all its various moods, including initial union, separation, hardship, jealousy, and reunion in marriage. The Nāyanmārs' understanding of themselves as women in relation to a male deity appears to be essential to their full comprehension of Śiva's love, and it reflects earlier indigenous beliefs regarding the sacred feminine, which were not only of relevance in the classical age but are of continuing significance in Tamil society today. The Caṅkam literature indicates that there were two contrasting views of the divine feminine, represented, on the one

hand, by the uncontrolled and demoniac *Kor\_ravai*, operating outside normal society, and, on the other, by human women, who functioned within society. Women were believed to have a sacred character, inherent in their very beings, which required to be contained and controlled through marriage and self-regulated behaviour. However, as intimated in the *Cilappatikāram*, and substantiated by modern ethnographic evidence, wifely submission necessarily entailed suffering, although this served to heighten and intensify the female capacity for feeling and also generated greater spiritual power. The close identification between the male **bhaktas** and women suggests that, in order to fully experience the totality of Śiva's love, they had to surmount their masculine identity, thereby exposing themselves to the pain and absence of separation, although this rendered them fully accessible to the deity. Ultimately, however, the *Nāyanmārs* are subordinate to the deity, and, in the manner of a human wife, their status in liberation is one of total dependence upon Śiva. These attitudes and beliefs are reflected on the divine level in the **bhaktas'** portrayal of the Goddess, who is always depicted in conjunction with Śiva. As the potentially harmful *Gaṅgā* or the fearful *Kālī* she is described as contained and controlled by Śiva, an image which also appears to imply the **bhaktas'** own spiritual condition. As his loving consort the Goddess illustrates the ideal to which the *Nāyanmārs* aspire, the perfect model of faithful, loving devotion to Śiva, apparently controlled not only by marriage but by her own chaste behaviour. However, ultimately it is the image of Śiva *Ardhanārīśvara* which appears to represent the **bhaktas'** complete understanding of divinity, for, although the Goddess is dependent upon Śiva, she is also an integral and essential part of divine totality.

The language, literature and ideology of the Tamil region all contributed to **bhakti**. Through the medium of the Tamil language the



**bhaktas** gave expression to their direct experiential knowledge of the divine, articulating every nuance of feeling and emotion involved in the divine relationship through the conventions of the **akam** poetic genre, and in terms and metaphors which derived from the indigenous cultural tradition. Their ideology was conditioned and defined by the cultural tradition into which they were born, and their perception of the deity as immanent and close-by, localised in specific places in the Tamil landscape, is dependent upon their Tamil heritage, enabling them to enter into a highly intimate and personal relationship with the deity. They adapted and integrated many features associated with the cult of **Murukan**, bringing to Śiva's worship an ecstatic and communal dimension previously absent from Brahmanical **bhakti**. The cult of **Murukan** appears to have been a crucial factor in determining the development of Tamil **bhakti**, and it is in the **Tirumurukārruppaṭai**, a text entirely dedicated to the indigenous deity, that the first expression of **bhakti** as a devotional attitude to a gracious God occurs in Tamil literature. The Tamil cultural background is also reflected in the positive place given to women in the spiritual experience of **bhakti**, and in the close identification between the **bhaktas** and women in their relationship of love with the male deity, a factor which influenced their ultimate understanding of the divine. **Bhakti** is inseparable from the indigenous Tamil tradition, and although it arose as a result of the political, cultural and religious changes of the centuries which preceded it, it is the indigenous tradition which provided the necessary stimulus for the re-working of Brahmanical **bhakti**, resulting in a popular religion of intense devotion to a loving and gracious God unprecedented in the history of Hinduism.

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